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Why the station is tuning in to its audience.

THE INDEPENDENT

Monday 9 February 1998 45p No 3,529

Millennium Bug: Blair goes to war

Exclusive

By Anthony Bevis
Political Editor

Tony Blair, who has been warned that the computer-based "Millennium Bug" could provoke a £250bn world recession, is mobilising world leaders behind a campaign for urgent action to tackle the crisis.

Following a discussion in Washington with President Bill Clinton last week it was agreed that the issue should be put on the formal agenda for the next summit of the G8 most industrialised countries, Birmingham, in May.

Contingency planning is underway in Whitehall to protect against breakdown in key industries like gas, electricity, water, railways, broadcasting and telecommunications.

The Prime Minister has agreed with Wim Kok, the Dutch Prime Minister, that Britain should stage "a round table conference of senior industry figures" from Europe, also expected in May.

The crisis will strike home on New Year's Day 2000 because millions of interlinked computers, across the world, are programmed to "think" the year 00 means 1900. The problem will be compounded by the fact that programmes are riddled with inconsistent reactions. One programme is reported to accept 90 to 29 as 2000 to 2029, but when 30 is offered, it reverts to 1930. A breakdown in one critical system can trigger an in-

finite domino effect, with unknown consequences.

In an appeal for a British lead, Mr Kok has warned the Prime Minister: "The chain is as strong as its weakest link, at national as well as international level."

Mr Blair replied: "I am convinced that the problem is larger and more urgent than many people realise, but if organisations act today there should still be time to deal with it."

But the Prime Minister warned: "There is a growing shortage of skilled people and governments and businesses will need to think hard about priorities."

A No 10 source has told *The Independent* that the new Cabinet committee, chaired by Margaret Beckett, President of the Board of Trade, would "focus particularly on infrastructure" - ensuring that contingency plans are in place. Mr Blair's campaign to create an impetus for action has been stimulated by apocalyptic warnings. One source close to the Prime Minister said last week that the "bug" could knock 2 per cent off the national income of all G8 countries in 2000: a £250bn bombshell.

That warning has been

tracked back to Wall Street guru Edward Yardeni, chief economist for Deutsche Morgan Grenfell, the investment bank, which gave evidence to a Senate hearing last November.

"Based on what I know so far," he told the hearing, "I believe there is a 40 per cent risk of a world-wide recession that will last at least 12 months starting in January 2000, and it could be as severe as the 1973-74 global recession."

A survey by PA Consulting reported that only 55 per cent of UK companies were fully aware of the implications of the "bug", and it is thought that only 20 per cent of small to medium-sized companies are up to scratch. "This sector may have serious difficulty in operating through the millennium," a No 10 source said.

Robin Guenier, the head of Taskforce 2000, which was set up with limited finance by the last Government, said yesterday: "This is a major threat to the British economy. Even though the levels of awareness in the UK are higher than anywhere else - the level of action is inadequate."

He said that while BT had made reasonable progress in upgrading its equipment less than half of European and North and South American systems had reached the British level of preparedness, while the proportion for south-east Asia was less than 25 per cent.



Echoes of Eddie the Eagle

It all seemed terribly familiar yesterday when Britain's Sam Temple crashed and was disqualified in the preliminary round of the men's moguls freestyle skiing competition at this year's Winter Olympics.

The other British competitor, Tim

Dudgeon, was in 28th position after the preliminary round. The final is on Wednesday.

Britain has got a team of just 35 at the games in Nagano, Japan, the smallest team it has sent to a Winter Olympics for 38 years.

Labour's backers use tax havens

Exclusive

By Kim Sengupta

Some of Labour's most prominent donors are taking advantage of tax loopholes in off-shore companies at a time when the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, claims he wants to get tough on tax avoidance.

Lord Putnam, the film mogul, industrialist Lord Paul, and publishing tycoon Lord Hamlyn were all made peers after Tony Blair came to power. As well as appearing in Labour's official list of major donors, they all have shares in off-shore trusts variously in Guernsey and the British Virgin Islands. Another wealthy donor, Abe Jaffe, boss of Currie Motors, holds almost all his shares in South Africa, Holland, and the Netherlands Antilles.

The *Independent's* disclosures come in the wake of the controversy surrounding Geoffrey Robinson and the revelation that the Paymaster General was a beneficiary of a £12.75m Guernsey-based offshore trust set up for his family.

Now other labour luminaries will fall under an embarrassing spotlight. Paul Hamlyn, the founder of Octopus Publishing is estimated to be worth £275m, and gave £500,000 to Labour, which is said to make him the party's biggest single investor. He has most of his shares in his key company, Michelin House Investment Company, in an account in Guernsey. David Putnam, a member of a government standards task force also holds 24 per cent of the shares in his main company, Enigma Productions Ltd, in Guernsey.

Steel magnate Swarj Paul,

whose family is estimated to be worth £500m, gave Labour more than £130,000 through his company Caparo. All the shares in the Caparo Group are held in the British Virgin Islands.

The family of car-dealer Abe Jaffe is estimated to be worth £60m. He is the chairman of Currie Motors, whose parent company Curfin Holdings BV is based in the Netherlands Antilles.

Lord Putnam, the producer of multi-Oscar winning *Chariots of Fire* and former chairman of Columbia Pictures, has never disclosed how much he had donated to Labour but has insisted to friends he had never sought to buy preferment.

The beneficiaries of Lord Paul's offshore company are all listed in the United Kingdom, and thus there are liable for UK taxes. Yesterday Lord Paul, a noted philanthropist, said: "The offshore company was set up in 1978 at the advice of lawyers and accountants... But if the Chancellor... changes the law I would not be that bothered."

Last night offices of Lord Hamlyn and Mr Jaffe said they were out of the country and unavailable for comment. Lord Putnam too was unavailable.



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Deadly smog returns to threaten Asia

Exclusive

From Richard Lloyd Parry
in Samarinda

Three months after clouds of choking smoke cleared from south-east Asia, the "haze" is back. "Terrifying" new fires and forest fires are burning out of control on the Indonesian islands of Borneo and Sumatra, threatening people, transport safety and wildlife in a region already ravaged by economic crisis.

More than 40 separate fires, and thousands of hectares of burned and smoking land, were visible yesterday during the 100km journey between the towns of Samarinda and Pontianak in Indonesian Borneo.

In several places flames were leaping at the edge of the road as fires ate their way through the underbrush at the rate of six or seven metres an hour. Forestry experts estimate that around 20,000 hectares of land - about the size of Birmingham - are burning in the province of East Kalimantan alone. It promises to be the biggest outbreak of forest fires on record.

"It's pretty terrifying," says Ludwig Schindler, leader of the German-run Integrated Forest Fire Management (IFFM) project in Samarinda, who surveyed the fires by helicopter last week. "From the air you see a lot of smoke but very little flame, because most of the fire is below the tree canopy and even below the ground in the peat swamps."

Satellite images last week revealed 247 "hot spots" indicating fires in Borneo alone, and further outbreaks are reported in Sumatra. With no rain in prospect, Indonesia faces a second year of unprecedented environmental disaster, on top

of the collapse of its currency, riots over food shortages and increasing political challenges to the authoritarian rule of President Suharto.

Airports in Borneo have already suffered delays due to enveloping smoke, and foreign organisations based there are preparing plans for the evacuation of employees if the health risks become too great. In the Kutai National Park in East Kalimantan, fires are destroying the habitats of orang utan, proboscis monkeys, and other protected species. Even the Foreign Office has been conducting its

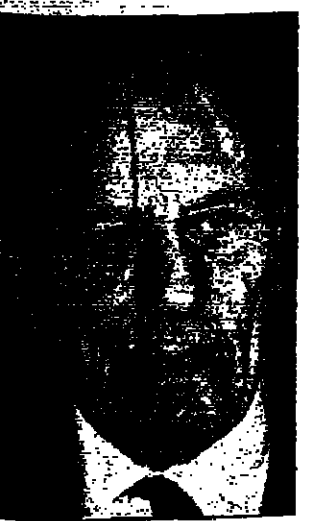
own anxious inquiries amid fears that drifting smoke from the fires will ruin the Commonwealth Games scheduled to be held in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, in September.

Experts believe that the fires are nearly all man-made, started deliberately as a means of forest clearance by local farmers and by big timber, mining and plantation companies. Some are deliberate acts of arson, both by companies attempting to drive local people off their land and as acts of revenge by displaced farmers. But the fires are spreading out

of control because of the exceptional absence of rain during what is usually south-east Asia's rainy season, a result of the El Nino weather pattern. Smoke caused by fires during last year's El Nino caused chaos in Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, southern Thailand and the Philippines. In Sumatra 234 people died in a plane crash which may have been caused by the haze. The total cost of the disaster is conservatively estimated at \$1.8bn and 2 million hectares of burned land in Indonesia alone.

Big business bonfire, page 11

Rivals pay tribute to Enoch Powell



Powell: "Brilliant mind"

The Prime Minister yesterday led the tributes to one of the most controversial Tories in post-war politics, Enoch Powell, who died in hospital at the age of 85.

"However controversial his views," Tony Blair said, "he was one of the great figures of 20th-century British politics, gifted with a brilliant mind."

"However much we disagreed with many of his views, there was no doubting the strength of his convictions or his sincerity, or his tenacity in pursuing them, regardless of his own political self-interest."

Mr Powell was one of a num-

ber of monetarist Treasury ministers who resigned from Macmillan's government in 1957; he was sacked from Edward Heath's shadow cabinet almost 30 years ago after making his controversial "Rivers of Blood" speech on immigration; in 1974, he defied his party over Europe, quitting parliament and urging the country to vote Labour; and when he staged his comeback, he did so as an Ulster MP whose defence of the Unionist cause at times embarrassed Margaret Thatcher - always one of his most ardent admirers.

Baroness Thatcher said yesterday: "There will never be any-

body else so compelling as Enoch Powell. He was magnetic. Listening to his speeches was an unforgettable privilege. He was one of those rare people who made a difference and whose moral compass led us in the right direction."

William Hague, the Tory leader, said: "There were disagreements, sometimes profound, between Enoch Powell and the Conservative Party. Nevertheless, his contribution has helped shape the history of our party and our times. He will not be forgotten."

Blair's town halls, page 8
Obituaries, page 16

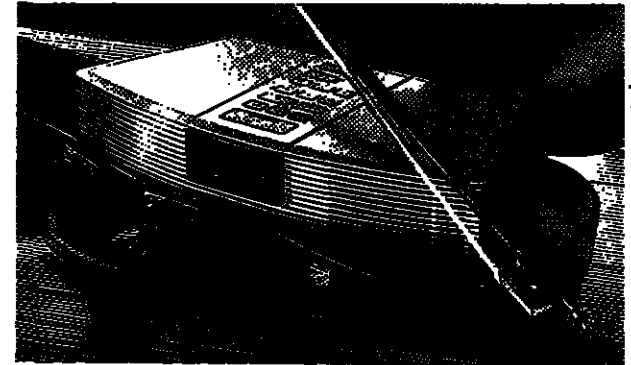
THE INDEPENDENT Save the Arts

The arts are in crisis with Treasury spending cuts biting deep into the cultural fabric of the country.

Today, *The Independent* joins *The Independent on Sunday* in launching a campaign to press the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, to use his Budget next month to introduce one small measure which will help fend off future theatre and orchestra closures.

He should introduce a change in taxation law to enable people to make tax-free donations to theatres, museums, galleries and orchestras. A simple system could be introduced to replace the muddled and cumbersome system of tax relief through covenants and the Gift Aid scheme. Mr Brown has already moved to help the film industry, join us in urging him to offer help to the rest of the beleaguered arts world.

Join the campaign, page 2



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No contest: Competition lawyers are trying to overturn a US distribution system which they claim loads the market in favour of blockbusters such as *Tomorrow Never Dies* to the detriment of European films such as *Trainspotting*

The EU has taken on Hollywood in an important ruling which could improve life for European cinema-goers jaded by a diet of American blockbusters. It could also mean a big boost for the British film industry. Katherine Butler reports from Brussels.

Alan Rickman and Phyllida Law were in the Belgian capital two weekends ago to promote *The Winter Guest*, one of the hundreds of European films screened during the Brussels film festival. The work of directors from places as unlikely as Bosnia, Macedonia and Iceland, as well as more than 30 examples of the new wave of Irish cinema, were also on offer.

Yet half of all Brussels cinema-goers during the same weekend queued up outside the city's multiplexes to see Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet meet their icy fate in *Titanic*.

Off screen, another script was being

European films take on Hollywood's big guns in fight for future of cinema

written. European Union competition lawyers were drafting a bombshell which Brussels dropped on Friday. The European Commission demanded the dismantling of UIP, the distribution arm in Europe for the three Hollywood studio giants Paramount, MGM and Universal.

What seems like an arcane dispute over the rules governing sales and distribution goes to the heart of a long running transatlantic war of words over what gets on to our cinema screens. And this dispute in turn goes to the core of the debate, led most vocally by the French, about how to protect and promote European cultural diversity in the face of American cinematic domination.

Whatever happens about the wider de-

bate, it seems certain that if UIP's distribution tactics are scrapped, the Hollywood blockbuster will be affected. The catalytic effect on the small but rapidly growing European film industry could be dramatic. Those who stand to benefit are the small, low-budget producers whose ability to compete tends to be hobbled before the box-office race even begins because they cannot break into the distribution network.

Central to European objections to UIP is the suspicion that it operates a "block booking" system which forces cinemas to buy packages which include a minimum number of weak titles, so that they are allowed to screen blockbusters such as *Jurassic Park* or *Tomorrow Never Dies*.

Sections of the European film industry even claim that UIP is to blame for Hollywood's success and Europe's failure in cinemas. Since 1987 American share of box-office revenue in Europe went from 56 per cent to more than 80 per cent.

What the European Commission has done is to tear up a special exemption which UIP has enjoyed since 1989 from the normal rules which regulate fair competition in the trade bloc. After lengthy investigations culminating in dawn raids on the offices of UIP in London, Paris and Brussels, Commission lawyers believe they have ample evidence to substantiate their decision.

UIP says the Brussels competition authorities are acting under the kind of po-

litical pressure which led a few years ago to calls for broadcasting quotas on European television stations. It says it is being scapegoated by an industry which can never produce films with the commercial appeal of their Hollywood rivals.

Perhaps most promising from the standpoint of the European industry is the timing: UIP's market share has already started to show a modest but unmistakable decline. Even UIP chiefs privately concede that European producers have been giving them a run for their money of late, mainly thanks to new tax incentives and matching government funds which some EU governments have started to pump into locally produced films.

The British MEP Carol Tongue, who

sits on the European Parliament's culture committee, believes the Brussels ruling, still being challenged by the American studios, represents a critical breakthrough. It may be particularly important for the British film industry which is on something of a roll after the success of *Trainspotting*, *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off*. "British films will now have a better chance of being made and distributed and of challenging American domination at the box office," she says.

She foresees an important trickle down effect. "We can expect to see more money going into British films because there will be more space for distributors of European work."

Nothing less is at stake, Tongue believes, than the survival of Europe's identity and culture. "Film is part of the cultural lifeblood of a society. We have to have space to tell our own stories hear our own voices and see the two coming together in film. And our children have the right to their own fairy stories interpreted by us. They deserve more diversity than they are getting from Disney."

Diana phenomenon becomes a matter of academic interest

Intellectuals are working overtime trying to fathom the meaning and implications of the death of the Princess of Wales. Clare Gomer reports on a fashionable new subject: Diana studies.



Diana: Intellectual property

She may have left school without an O-level in her name, but Diana, Princess of Wales is rapidly becoming the Professors' Princess. Her life, and death, are the subject of intense study, spawning a host of lectures, courses and conferences across the academic disciplines.

Last week, the University of Kent staged a conference entitled "New Sensibilities", at which sociologists, psychoanalysts and literary figures - plus a token priest - picked apart with an academic toothcomb the nation's reaction to Diana's death. Specialists in art history, feminism, sociology, history, psychology, media studies and religious studies, are all finding things to say on the subject.

While there is, as yet, no journal of Diana studies, a wide range of publications have devoted pages - if not issues - to Dianology. *The British Medical Journal*, *The New Left Review* and the literary mag-

azine *Granta* have published screeds. The *Modern Review* relaunched itself recently as the magazine which would address "the post-Diana age".

Germany was first to put Diana on the curriculum. In November, Berlin's Free University began a series of 13 lectures entitled "Myths and Politics from Princess of Wales to the Queen of Hearts". The course organisers say they were snowed under with inquiries. Was Diana a "living simulacrum" or a symbol of "faux modernity"? Could the reaction to her death be described as "grief-lite"? What does it tell us about "uncertainty and social psycholog-

ical responses"? It is perhaps only a matter of time before such questions are appearing on examination papers.

Two weeks ago, a psychoanalytic conference at the University of East London was held under the heading: "The Princess, the Premier and the People: Authority in New Britain." Lancaster University has hosted a one-day conference looking at the Princess's elevation to cultural icon.

Jeffrey Richards, professor of cultural history at Lancaster, has likened the Diana phenomenon to the Falklands war. "Both took academics completely by surprise," he said.

"Before the Falklands, people were saying that patriotism was on the way out, that it was something that belonged to a different era. That produced a wealth of academic research, but this has something more. It is not just the intensity but also the nature of the public demonstration that will keep academics enthralled for years to come."

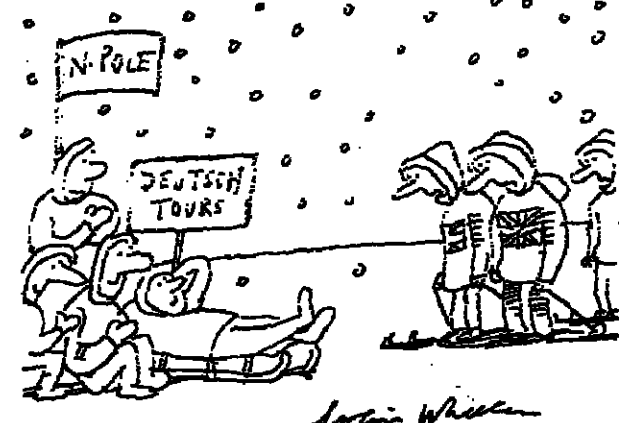
Harrods boss Mohammed Al Fayed yesterday rejected a claim that his deceased son and Diana's last love, Dodi, had a secret love child. His spokesman Michael Cole said that after an investigation he had concluded - "with some degree of disappointment" - that Mr Fayed did not in fact have a grandchild.

Ends of the earth ... for the ultimate holiday

For people attracted to the prospect of shooting the Colorado in a bathtub or traversing the Gobi on a mule, a British explorer may have come up with the ultimate holiday.

While many may consider an Outward Bound-style holiday about as enticing as dose of piles, Pen Hadow believes there are people who will jump at the chance to complete one of the last great natural challenges - trekking to the North or South Pole.

In a country where the final diaries of the dying Captain Scott as he struggled to survive the Antarctic, have become ingrained in the public psyche, Mr Hadow should perhaps know better. But the polar explorer is confident of the attraction of walking 500 miles while pulling a sledge across the



the last great challenges - and they are open to anyone who is up for it. More people have climbed Everest than have walked the entire distance to either of the Poles," he said.

Seven months ago, another of Mr Hadow's projects made history when a relay of 20

women became the first all-female expedition to reach the North Pole.

His latest challenges offer the option of walking part of the way to either pole. But anyone who wants to take part in the project in spring next year, will first have to pass a gruelling

assessment in a British wilderness. "Dartmoor makes a very good test-bed for people looking to go - what is important is to simulate levels of stress and monitor the reaction of people to it in performance terms," he said.

The North Pole expedition members will pull 150 sledges for 500 miles from Ward Hunt Island, in northern Canada, between March and May next year. Those battling all the way will be resupplied three times en route.

Mr Hadow's Polar Travel Company, which is based on Dartmoor, will run an identical expedition to the South Pole between November next year and January 1999.

The treks will cost £9,000 for a leg, or £25,000 for the whole distance.

— Andrew Buncombe

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Twin threat to Blair as ministers are told to oppose controls on newspaper price war

Tony Blair is facing the threat of combined Lords and Commons revolt against the government line on Rupert Murdoch's predatory pricing tactics.

Peers vote tonight on a cross-party amendment to the Competition Bill, that would outlaw cut-price campaigns run by newspapers like the *Times* in attempting to drive competitors out of business.

Lord McNally, the Liberal Democrat peer who has initiated the amendment,

warns that if action is not taken in the new Bill, vulnerable newspapers like *The Independent* and the *Daily Telegraph* could be put at risk.

That argument is backed today by Lord Desai, a Labour peer and professor of economics at the London School of Economics, who says in today's *Independent* that a dog-eat-dog culture must not be allowed because it is essentially anti-competitive. "Companies which have resources to last out a long

battle can engage in price wars," he says. "Their rivals either have to follow suit and match any cuts in price cut or suffer a loss of market share and go under. After a while, the company with more resources wins the field by driving out the rivals."

If there was a government defeat in the Lords tonight, ministers could be expected to try to use their massive majority in the Commons to overturn the decision. But there are growing indications of spreading

revolt in Labour ranks against Mr Murdoch, and the unspoken agreement under which Downing Street appears to be offering protection for the newspaper proprietor.

The *Independent* has been reliably informed that a "hands-off" order has been passed down to ministers from No 10, which is why the Department of Trade and Industry is resisting the "Murdoch amendment" in spite of pre-election promises that action would be taken.

However, Labour MPs are unlikely to respond with enthusiasm to an instruction to defend Mr Murdoch's interests.

Giles Radice, the loyalist Labour chairman of the Commons Treasury select committee, told BBC television's *On the Record* yesterday: "It would be wrong for us not to do what is right because of the consequences of not having, say the *Sun*, or Mr Rupert Murdoch or whatever, on your side. I think it would be unwise of us

and in the long run damage our credibility in the country."

Chris Mullin, Labour chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee, told the same programme: "The power at the disposal of Mr Murdoch is so great that it is unhealthy for a democracy. And the problem is that no political party dare take him on for fear that he will unleash his power against them."

— Anthony Bevins, Political Editor

Nine-year-olds let down by poor maths teachers

Results of tests for nine-year-olds which will be published today are expected to show that children are not making enough progress between the ages of seven and nine. Judith Judd, Education Editor, reports.

At present, pupils take national tests at the ages of 7, 11 and 14 but there is growing concern among school inspectors that standards are unacceptably low among eight- and nine-year-olds. Chris Woodhead, chief inspector of schools, said in his annual report last week that 15 per cent of lessons for eight-year-olds were unsatisfactory compared with 12 per cent for six-year-olds and 10 per cent for 11-year-olds. He also suggested that some heads were putting their weakest teachers in charge of classes of eight-year-olds.

Today, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority will report on tests in maths and English taken by nine-year-olds in 270 pilot schools. They are thought to indicate that children's progress is too slow after they take the national tests for seven-year-olds. This summer, the authority will make tests for nine-year-olds available to all schools which wish to use them.

Mr Woodhead last week encouraged teachers to take up the opportunity. But the Department for Education and Employment made it clear yesterday that ministers are not at present considering compulsory national tests for this age group.

A spokeswoman said the tests helped teachers by diagnosing pupils' strengths and weaknesses. "This is the first year in which nine-year-olds have been looked at. We have not made any decision about what we are going to be doing in the future."

Kenneth Baker, the former secretary of state for education, who introduced the national curriculum nearly a decade ago, considered setting up tests for nine-year-olds but was dissuaded by his advisers who said that schools would be spending too much time testing children and not enough teaching them. Ministers have already agreed to start national assessments for another age-group - five-year-olds - from September.

● A Conservative MP has condemned the arrest of five teachers at a nursery school over allegations of mistreatment as "sheer madness".

Alan Duncan, Tory MP for Melton Mowbray, said he was "appalled and dismayed" that five teachers at a private day nursery in the Leicestershire town had been charged with offences of cruelty.

The MP said all the parents of children at the nursery were backing the accused staff, who are understood not to face any allegations involving physical or sexual abuse.

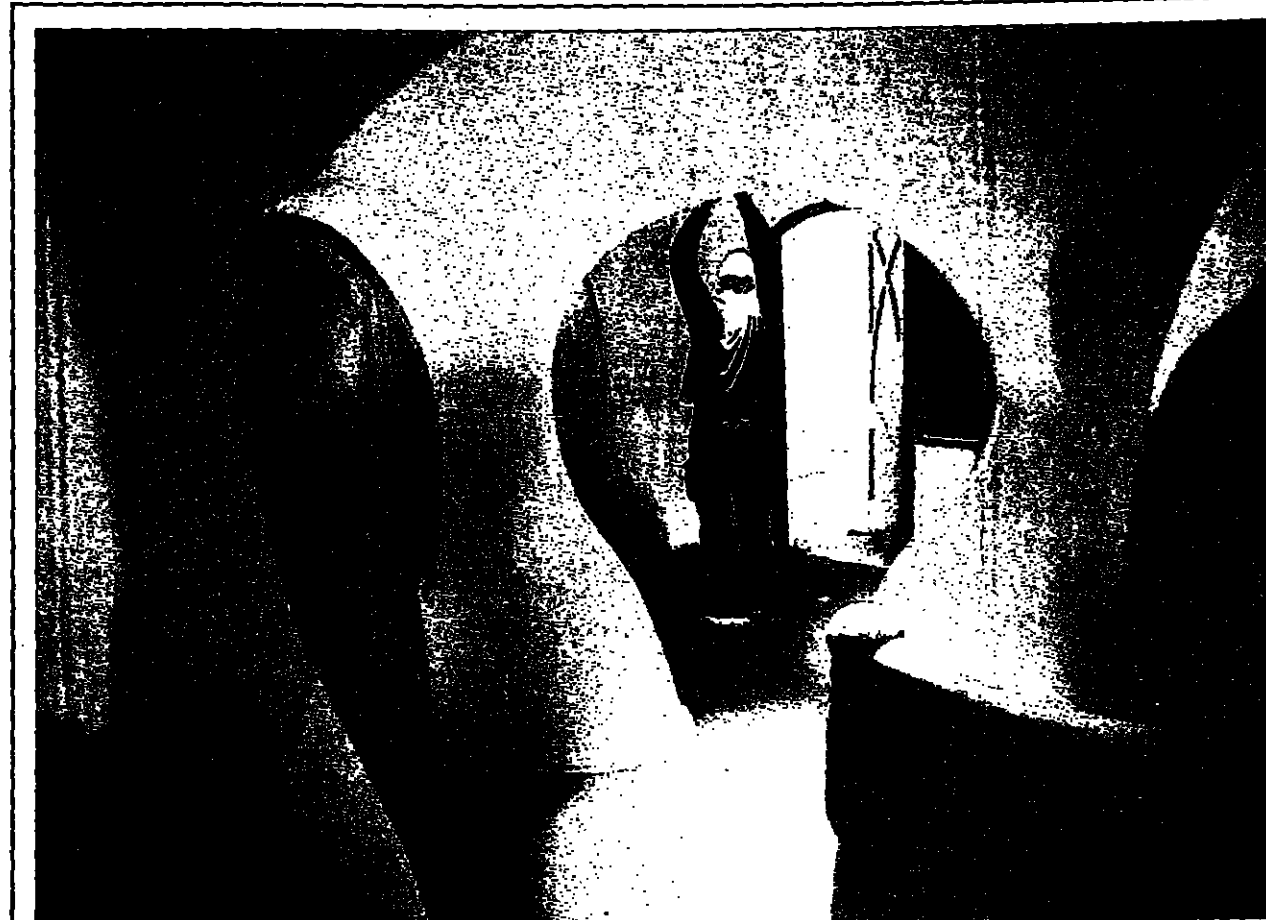
The five staff had been arrested last weekend for "no good reason whatsoever", Mr Duncan said.

He added: "The system has taken over here and become a complete nightmare. Every single parent supports the staff and school and no parent has complained."

The MP is now set to meet with the Crown Prosecution Service, police and social services next week in a bid to resolve the issue. The parents of the children who are alleged to have been mistreated are "livid" and want all charges dropped, Mr Duncan claimed.

Four people have been charged with wilfully ill-treating a child in a manner likely to cause injury or suffering.

A fifth person has also been charged with causing or procuring ill-treatment.



Living space: The revolutionary 'bubble home' gets a last touch before going on show this week at Tomorrow's World Live 98 in the NEC, Birmingham, with a designers' claim that it could make us a calmer nation. Photograph: News Team

Men shrug off loss of a testicle

Men often appear able to shrug off the loss of a testicle from cancer, according to findings published in the *British Medical Journal*.

Research by a medical sociologist showed that most men who have had a testicle removed reject counselling, and the men taking part in the Cancer Research Campaign-backed study claimed they retained a sense of wellbeing and self-control.

Clare Moynihan, from the Institute of Cancer Research in Sutton, south-west London, said: "When we assessed the men for anxiety two months into the study it seemed as though those who received counselling were coping better. But at the end of the year it appeared that they were not better off than the control group."

NHS and the Pill

More than 98 per cent of people believe contraception should remain free on the NHS, a survey revealed yesterday.

The NOP poll, to mark the start of the first Contraceptive Awareness Week, follows concerns that the Government is considering charging women who are better off financially for the Pill. The survey was commissioned by the Contraceptive Alliance - a coalition of family planning experts, charities, advice groups and birth-control manufacturers - to find out how aware people are of methods of contraception and family planning services.

Film for fast drivers

Speeding drivers stopped by the police this week are to be given the option of a fine - or a film show.

The Operation Slowdown campaign is to be run at speed and accident blackspots across Cornwall in a bid to reduce speed-related accidents, said the police. Motorists stopped for exceeding the legal limit will have the choice of paying a £40 fixed penalty fine and collecting three penalty points on their licence, or visiting a nearby village hall to watch a road safety video and listen to advice on their driving.

Warning over self-medication

Doctors, nurses and pharmacists are today warning people to seek professional advice before using over-the-counter medicines.

They say that although advertisements can help people decide which medication to use, this should not be a substitute for asking for help.

The warning from organisations representing the three

professions including the British Medical Association, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and the Royal College of Nursing is in response to the growing number of people who are turning to non-prescription medicines.

An official statement said: "Although advertising is helpful in informing people about the medicines available for self-

medication, it should be responsible and should support, rather than inhibit, the advisory role of health professionals."

The alliance claims that medicines should not be regarded as ordinary consumer goods but special products to be stored and used with care and according to directions.

They should only be on sale if there is proper professional

advice at hand, it says.

Peter Curphey, president of the Royal Pharmaceutical College, said: "Health professionals recognise that, as people are given more information about medicines in the media and are encouraged to take more responsibility for their own health status, self-medication is likely to play a much more prominent role in health care."

FoE plan to 'name and shame' investors in pollution

Friends of the Earth is sifting the policies of the country's top financial services companies to compile a blacklist of the most environmentally unethical investors.

The group said it would publish a list to "name and shame" banks, building societies and insurers with the worst record

for investing people's money in industries that harm the environment.

Such companies invest billions of pounds of people's savings every year and are the lifeblood of much of the world's industry.

Friends of the Earth said it hoped that

by publishing the names of the dirtiest investors it would persuade customers to switch their accounts, pressurising the institutions to invest in greener businesses. It would also encourage the polluters themselves to adopt a greener attitude, the group said.

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Carl Wilson, Beach Boy founder of surfin' style, dies



Carl Wilson (at the microphone) with fellow Beach Boys Mike Love (centre) and Bruce Johnston

Photograph: AP

Carl Wilson, one of the founding members of the The Beach Boys, has died aged 51. *Clare Garner* reports on the man who dedicated his life to fun, fun, fun, right up until the very end.

When Carl Wilson was diagnosed with lung cancer last year he insisted on carrying on touring with the other three Beach Boys even though he was undergoing chemotherapy. It was his 36th year of touring since they founded the band in 1961 and, as it turned out, his last.

The Californian-born guitarist, who sang lead vocal on one of the group's biggest hits "Good Vibrations", died in Los Angeles on Friday evening of complications from lung cancer.

His wife Gina, who is the actor Dean Cain's daughter, and his sons Jonah, 23, and Justin, 26, were with him when he died, but the other surviving members of the band - his brother Brian Wilson, Mike Love and Al Jardine - were not.

A private funeral is planned for this week.

It is not known whether the rest of the band - known for its laid-back "surfin'" style of music of the early 1960s and hits such



The Beach Boys in the Sixties. Carl Wilson is at top right

as "California Girls", "Help Me Rhonda", "Fun, Fun, Fun" and "God Only Knows" - will go ahead with a planned symphonic tour this summer.

Carl formed the Beach Boys in 1961 along with his older brothers, Brian and Dennis, who drowned while swimming off

his yacht in December 1983. They recruited their cousin Mike Love and Jardine, their neighbour in Hawthorne, California, to play their own form of surfin' music in the era just before the Beatles were to transform rock forever.

Their first hit "Surfin' Safari" launched surf music as a fad and they followed it up in early 1963 with "Surfin' USA."

On stage, the group's creative force, bass player and producer, Brian, appeared awkward and fans focused more on drummer Dennis's good looks and the good-humoured banter between Love and Carl.

The band developed a distinctive style, with hits like "I Get Around", "In My Room" and "Don't Worry Baby".

Their ground-breaking 1966 album *Pet Sounds* has often been compared favorably to the Beatles' *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

However, *Pet Sounds* sold poorly, and it wasn't until the "psychedelic" classic "Good Vibrations" - a symphonic Top Forty single - that the Beach Boys were elevated to rock superstardom.

Personality problems began to take a toll on the group in the Seventies and as Brian Wilson became paranoid and idiosyncratic, the band's star began to wane, reaching a low point with Dennis's death.

Jowell launches new drive to cut teenage pregnancy

The key to reducing the number of unmarried mothers could lie in encouraging teenage boys to talk about the emotional and physical aspects of their relationships, a government minister said today.

As part of a national programme to be launched in May, Tessa Jowell, the public health minister, wants schools and community groups to work with young people to focus on relationships "in their whole sense".

The Government is urging boys to get in touch with their feelings, in a bid to tackle Britain's record of having the highest rate of teenage pregnancies in Western Europe.

Ms Jowell said: "Young boys tend to judge relationships by sex. If we can get boys to be more in touch with their feelings and talk about them, I think it would be a marker for progress."

The move has been welcomed by sex education and family planning experts who say there is a need to move away from the macho British culture and to encourage boys to express their feelings.

Alison Hadley, of Brook Advisory Centres which offer contraceptive advice to young people, said: "Whether or not a young woman uses contraception is influenced by her partner's views and we know from research that boys have

very little sex education other than from their peers.

"Improving communication about sex is the key to making progress but we must help boys reflect and express their feelings as well as girls."

"The British culture of 'boys don't cry' makes this very difficult. To make progress boys need male role models of good communication, at home from their fathers, from older boys, as well as from soap operas, footballers and magazines."

Every year, around 7,500 under-16s become pregnant in Britain, although half have the pregnancies terminated.

But there are marked regional differences in the rates of teenage pregnancies. Apart from the deprived London district of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham, there is a clear north/south divide, with the deprived urban areas in the North having the highest rates.

The Government aims to tackle these regional inequalities through local targets set by health authorities.

Ms Jowell said: "There is also a role for parents and for teachers. Having sex at 12 or 13 robs you of childhood and it is the job of parents and teachers to safeguard a childhood."

Focus groups to look at the issue, involving young people, parents and teachers, will be set up in the spring.

Dome to host the mother of all game shows

The millennium Dome could become the venue for the game show of the century, it emerged yesterday.

Organisers of the Dome said they are negotiating with television companies for shows to be beamed from the site in Greenwich throughout 2000.

No deals have been agreed, but it is thought that a highlight of the television schedules will be a long-running game show, culminating in a series of contests of physical and mental ability in the Dome.

Other television events expected to take advantage of the Dome's television studios and massive display space include awards ceremonies, concerts, discussion shows and educational programmes.

A spokesman for the New Millennium Experience Company, which has the task of filling the Dome, said: "No deal has been signed and I cannot confirm any details of what programmes might be made... but we expect a number of live broadcasts from the Dome."

DAILY POEM

Love is not all

By Edna St Vincent Millay

Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink
Nor slumber nor a roof against the rain;
Nor yet a floating spar to men that sink
And rise and sink and rise and sink again;
Love can not fill the thickened lung with breath,
Nor clean the blood, nor set the fractured bone;
Yet many a man is making friends with death
Even as I speak, for lack of love alone.
It well may be that in a difficult hour,
Pinned down by pain and moaning for release,
Or nagged by want past resolution's power,
I might be driven to sell your love for peace,
Or trade the memory of this night for food.
It well may be. I do not think I would.

The Daily Poems for this pre-Valentine's Day week come from *The Book of Love*, an 800-page anthology of prose and poetry from many different periods and cultures, edited by Diane Ackerman and Jeanne Mackin (WW Norton, £22.50)

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Valentine sweet-talk could mask a violent monster, abuse charity warns

Women hoping to be swept off their feet by a slick Romeo on Valentine's Day are being warned that their heart-throb could be a violent monster.

Domestic abuse charity Refuge says the smooth-talking charmer is just as likely to hand out a beating as any man, after a survey found most people still believe that wife beaters are working-class drunkards.

Welfare workers warn that seductive chat and a raffish smile could simply be the early stages of a power game played by men who isolate and manipulate women before subjecting them to violence.

The nationwide survey, carried out last month, shows seven out of 10 think domestic abuse is much more likely in poorer homes and nine out of 10 believe it is

caused by alcohol. Stress in the workplace is also cited as a major cause. Sandra Horley, chief executive of Refuge, said: "It's a myth that the macho man who drinks heavily and is under stress at work is more likely to abuse his partner. The charming man who wines and dines you is just as likely to abuse women. Domestic abuse knows no social, cultural or racial barriers and this

survey shows us that society is out of touch."

With millions hoping a secret admirer will be unveiled on February 14, women are being told to watch out for the tell-tale signs of men who use attentiveness and charm to manipulate and control.

The survey has also unveiled an "inaccurate" picture of abuse victims - 40 per cent of the 975 people interviewed believe

women enjoy being beaten. Seven out of 10 also think some women provoke domestic violence.

Attitudes to punishment for wife beaters also remain out of kilter, according to Refuge. Some 68 per cent of men believe a drink-driver should be automatically sent to prison, whereas only 45 per cent think an abuser deserves the same punishment.

The charity says that while many women are unable to leave their homes, it takes great strength to live with an abusive man. Refuge estimates that one in nine women are severely beaten by their male partners Sandra Horley said: "While people continue to believe these myths and ignore the problem, they continue to endanger women's lives on a daily basis."

Drug offers relief for asthma sufferers

The first drug in two decades to offer a new way of controlling asthma symptoms is launched today. Jeremy Lawrence, Health Editor, asks if it spells the end of the inhaler.

A tablet taken once a day to prevent inflammation of the lungs may become a regular part of the treatment of asthma patients.

The drug, montelukast, is the first of a new kind of anti-asthma medicine. It is intended as an add-on treatment, to be taken with existing drugs, to reduce day and night-time attacks.

Trials of the drug, to be sold under the brand name Singulair, have shown it cuts attacks in people with moderate asthma by half when taken with inhaled

steroids. It is intended for use by adults and children over six years old with chronic mild to moderate asthma whose disease is inadequately controlled.

Professor Mike Silverman, chairman of the National Asthma Campaign's education committee, said: "For some, but by no means all people with asthma, it will offer a completely new way of controlling asthma symptoms. Our main message is that tablet treatments are not going to be suitable for everybody. It is a long way off before people with the condition will be able to take a once-a-day pill instead of an inhaler."

Professor Silverman said it was too early to say which patients would benefit most. "For those whose asthma is very mild, the tablet might replace existing preventer medication, but more studies are needed before this can be recommended."

"People with asthma have al-

ways relied on inhaler devices to deliver medication to their lungs. It is essential to talk with your doctor to find out if it is going to be appropriate for you."

The new drug is targeted at leukotrienes, chemicals in the lungs that produce asthmatic symptoms by causing the muscles in the airways to tighten, the cells to produce extra mucus and the lining to become inflamed. By blocking the action of the leukotrienes, inflammation is reduced and the tubes in the lung opened up, allowing the patient to breathe more easily.

In addition to helping people with chronic asthma, the new drug will be used to help stop asthma attacks brought on by exercise.

• The suffering, illness and premature death caused by air-pollution from road traffic is costing at £11bn a year, according to the British Lung Foundation.

The report says one-third of the population is susceptible to the effects of pollution, including young children, pregnant women and the chronically ill. It uses a "willingness to pay" method for assessing the impact of pollution on people's lives rather than assessing only the costs of treating pollution-related health problems.

The figure of £11bn is obtained by multiplying the number of pollution-related illness events (days of cough, asthma attacks, etc) and premature deaths by people's willingness to pay to avoid the risk of them happening.



Stepping out: Choreographer Ashley Page and dancer Sian Murphy rehearsing for the world premiere of his new work *When We Stop Talking* which will be performed at the Lyceum Theatre, Sheffield, on 23 February during the Royal Ballet's regional tour, 'Dance Bites' Photograph: Laurie Lewis

EPIDEMIC OF THE MODERN WORLD

- Three-and-a-half million people in the UK are estimated to suffer from asthma, including 1.5 million children aged 2 to 15.
- In 1995, around 1,621 people in the UK died as a result of the disease - one person every five hours. Before the Sixties there were around 100,000 cases a year and just a handful of asthma-related deaths.
- Asthma is the only treatable chronic condition in the Western world which is on the increase. The number of children with the disease has doubled since the Seventies, with on average 155 admitted to hospital every day.
- There were more than 100,000 hospital admissions due to asthma attacks in 1993 - a 7 per cent rise on the previous year.
- Annual prescriptions for asthma treatments almost doubled in the years 1982 to 1992 with the cost of NHS treatment rocketing from £50m to £350m during that time.
- Asthma is caused by chemicals in the body which cause airways to tighten when asthmatics come in contact with certain allergens.

Clinton visit plan gets mixed reception in Ulster

Bill Clinton's offer to visit Northern Ireland as the peace talks enter their final stage this May met with a mixed response in the province yesterday.

The United States President gave an assurance to Tony Blair during their Washington talks that he was willing to go to Belfast if the peace process

stays on track. His visit would probably take place in mid-May - the time the deadline for agreement which has been set.

Sinn Féin and the Social Democratic and Labour Party welcomed the possibility, but the Ulster Unionists accused the President of interfering at a crucial time in the peace process.

The Unionist deputy lord mayor of Belfast, Jim Rodgers, said: "Quite clearly he is intending to come here to try to influence as well as interfere in our affairs and I think he has as many problems of his own in America."

Party leader David Trimble was dismissive of the proposed visit: "I can quite understand his

desire to be away from Washington," he said.

Meanwhile, Sinn Féin's Dodi McGuinness said the visit would be "welcome", although privately Sinn Féin sources said there were "several hurdles to get over" before they could envisage a presidential visit to seal any agreement.

Mark Durkan, of the SDLP, said: "We would welcome this as an indication of the President's on-going commitment to the peace process here. He has always been keen to support the affairs of the two governments... and no doubt any further visit would take place on that basis."

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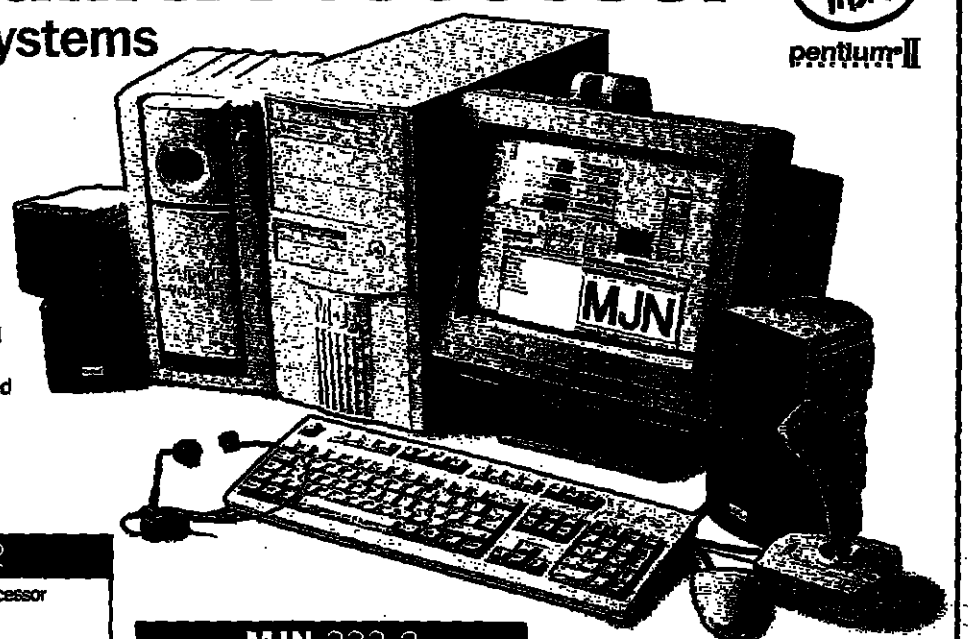
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Body of stowaway found after flight from Azerbaijan

The body of a stowaway was found yesterday in the undercarriage of an aircraft that had flown for nearly seven hours from one of the former Soviet republics. *Louise Jury* hears immigration organisations' fears that stowing away in dangerous places is on the increase.

The British Airways 767 arrived at Gatwick Airport direct from Baku in the former Soviet republic of Azerbaijan on Friday night and a man's body was discovered when maintenance checks began yesterday morning.

The incident is the latest case where stowaways have attempted to sneak on to an aircraft via the undercarriage. Evidence suggests that in many cases they have been told by racketeers that they will be able to creep up into pressurised baggage holds or the passenger deck for the flight.

A British Airways spokeswoman said yesterday that an investigation had been launched into the incident: "Obviously, we will be talking to the authorities in Baku."

Claude Moraes, director of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, said risky attempts at immigration were increasing. "There is a global increase in the number of racketeers who take advantage of desperate people who want to flee persecution, war or deep poverty," he said.

"They take money from these people and then send them into situations which put their lives at risk. In some cases, people have been told falsely that they can climb into the aircraft through the wheel bay," He added that the Government should

crack down on those operating illegal immigration operations but treat the immigrants themselves with compassion.

Nick Hardwick, of the Refugee Council, said the organisation was researching the scale of the problem. One of its concerns is that because immigration control is increasingly taking place outside the country, people are being prevented from travelling to Britain legitimately. Airlines are fined thousands of pounds if they bring in passengers who do not have correct immigration papers and most prefer not to take the risk, refusing to carry some passengers.

Increasing attempts to smuggle illegal immigrants into Britain are a by-product of the breakdown of political systems or ethnic violence in regions such as the former Yugoslavia or Soviet Union. "People try to make this sharp distinction between political refugees and economic migrants, but it is much more blurred than that," Mr Hardwick said. Political repression or social breakdown prevent people getting jobs or education, he added.

He said more effort should be made to allow refugees to put their case for being allowed to travel and to find out whether they have any chance of being allowed into their destination.

In 1996, 20-year-old Pardeep Saini survived a 10-hour flight in the wheel bay of an aircraft from India to London when his body went into a coma-like state of hibernation at temperatures that fell to -40C. His brother, Vijay, 19, died during the flight. Mr Saini said they had fled the Punjab after being accused of being Sikh militants. They were told by a racketeer in Delhi that for £150 he would show them an easy way out of the country, claiming they could get into the baggage hold from the wheel bay.



Street art: Daniel Nash, who is taking part in the Young People's Graffiti Project based in Bristol. It is a drugs education and awareness scheme which aims to allow youngsters the chance to express themselves in murals which will be exhibited around the city. Photograph: Rui Xavier

Why laptops, computer games and CDs risk causing airline catastrophe

Airliners are being put at risk by CD players, laptop computers and computer games used by passengers. *Colin Brown* warns those nervous about flying to stop reading now.

A short-haul flight was at cruising altitude over England when two compasses split and the autopilot engaged. It was the sort of technical flap that air crews are trained to

deal with. A quick check on the passenger cabin uncovered the reason for the problem. One of the passengers was using a laptop computer and all systems were returned to normal when it was switched off.

This seemingly routine act by a businessman on board the flight is one of the worrying hazards that air crews now have to contend with. And computers are not the only problem. CD players, personal stereo units and a video Walkman have all caused interference with flight controls in 19 incidents over the past five years.

They were detailed in a Commons written answer by Glenda Jackson, Under-Secretary of State for Transport, to Labour MP Gwyneth Dunwoody who described the results as "very worrying". Mrs Dunwoody said she was looking at links between air accidents and electronic gadgets.

The report shows that two flights in one month, March, 1993, suffered interference with their Omega navigation equipment from passengers' electronic gadgets.

Many passengers regard the routine warning about electronic equipment as a

bore, and are tempted to use their mobile telephones, but the litany of possible disasters may make them think twice in future.

On 21 April 1994, a Boeing 767 suddenly found interference on all VHF channels. It was caused by a passenger's CD player. On 26 October 1995, a Boeing 737 suffered a sudden change to selected altitude on the autopilot flight direction system. No culprit was identified but interference from passengers' personal stereos was suspected.

On 19 March 1996, another 737 suffered

a failure of the flight management system for several minutes. Interference from a portable computer was suspected.

On 21 July 1996, a Boeing 767 suffered the failure of the flight management system. Interference from a passenger's electronic equipment was suspected but no one was caught using any gadgets.

In the most recent case revealed by the Ministry of Transport, a short-haul flight was forced off its track on 9 January 1997. A passenger's computer is believed to have interfered with the navigation equipment.

But it is not always the fault of passengers. On 1 May 1995, significant interference was encountered with the flight deck instruments of an Augusta A109 helicopter. Experts concluded that it was probably caused by a high-intensity radio mast in the area.

The number of confidential reports involving human factors putting planes at risk is also rising. In 1995, there were 16 cases reported by air traffic controllers, but Ms Jackson said the number rose to 24 in 1996 and 39 in 1997.

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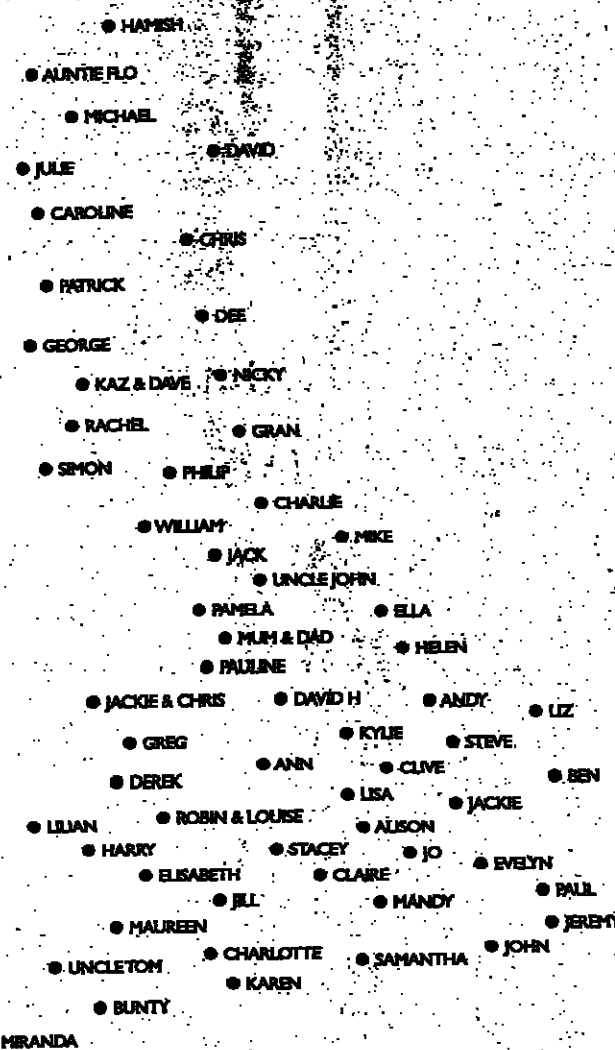
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Blair's town halls: the older man need not apply

They stood to applaud him yesterday, the serried ranks of greying, older Labour male councillors gathered at the party's annual local government conference in Scarborough - but they will shortly find out that Tony Blair has plans to take their chairs away.

"The Labour Party in government has to have the courage to change," the Prime Minister warned them, and judging by what the Government is about to do, he means councils. Under the slogan "New Labour, New Councillors" he is calling for no less than the departure of most existing Labour representatives in city and borough authorities and their replacement

by younger people. He said yesterday he wants "to boost people power" and modernise local government. He hinted that unless large numbers of Labour's older councillors go voluntarily, they will be compulsorily retired.

Starting today with the publication of a government paper on council procedures intended to make them more "user-friendly", the Prime Minister has authorised a campaign to persuade male councillors of a certain age to stand down.

Hilary Armstrong, the local government minister, is primed to tour the country telling party councillors to smarten up, re-

juvenate and change their sex. More than a third of councillors are now over retirement age and fewer than 25 per cent are women.

At the conference, John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, announced a national Labour plan for recruiting younger councillors. Project 99 will set local Labour parties targets for getting younger people and women on selection panels for local government elections. The party's regional offices are to start weeding names from candidate lists.

By way of compensation, Ms Armstrong will offer ex-councillors informal positions as "mentors and guides" through the mu-

nicipal labyrinth to the new younger members - if they can be recruited. In many areas, candidates for council office are in short supply. The problem is not confined to the Labour Party, either.

The consultation paper being issued today by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions will outline ways in which it hopes councils could become more attractive to younger members and to the public at large. It will recommend annual elections in all councils, with perhaps a third or a quarter of councillors stepping down each year, together with a new set of techniques for consulting the public on council decisions such as "citizens'

juries". The paper will, however, stop short of endorsing proportional representation. It will be ambiguous, too, about the principle of elected mayors for every council.

Mr Prescott used his conference speech to attack the House of Lords for delaying the government Bill allowing a referendum in London on the creation of a mayor and elected assembly. But outside London, few councillors seem to want mayors. So far only a single non-London member of the Local Government Association - the national grouping of local authorities - has come out in favour of the reform. Privately, Tony Blair told Labour coun-

cillors that they have "lost their place in the hearts and minds of local people". Fresh from his meeting with President Clinton, he will use American examples to show that local government can be a "vital part of local life".

But in his public address he sympathised with councillors for their "frustration in wanting change quicker. I feel that frustration too". Mr Blair added: "The purpose of change is not to obliterate basic values. It is actually to make them live again. Values that matter and concepts of ideals worth fighting for require a courage to make them live again."

— David Walker



Scarborough councillor Ian Stubbs, 53: 'Whatever age, you have to be committed' Photograph: Keith Meagheringham



Fresh start: Anna Sofat, third from left, at a Commons reception for new councillors Photograph: Bill Rowntree

'It has to depend on ability, not quotas or gender'

Ian Stubbs, 53, is an electrician who has served on Scarborough Borough Council for 19 years, and was mayor in 1995. He thought Tony Blair's speech "inspirational - if you were beginning to question whether we were moving the right way, it gave me all the answers".

But he had some doubts about the details. "I don't think in all honesty you can look at the numbers of women or ethnic minorities in isolation and say there aren't enough," he said. "It has to depend on abil-

ity and the quality of the candidates. It sells women short if you say it's just a matter of having 40 or 50 per cent."

"The leader of Scarborough Borough Council is a woman and she isn't there because of quotas or because of her gender. She's the best person for the job."

He regards himself as a young councillor but, at 54 this year, is approaching the over-55 group the Prime Minister cited as being prevalent in local government. "Traditionally, people have kept out of pol-

itics until they have retired, but nobody should be deterred from politics by people saying you haven't the experience."

Whatever age, you do have to be committed to do the job properly, he said. He sees the argument for having full-time councillors, but is less convinced about the need for a chief executive-style mayor for towns. "With elected mayors, talking about London is one thing, talking about the region I represent is another."

Interviews: Louise Jury

'Young people aren't going to wait years for their turn'

Anna Sofat, 38, is a marketing manager and mother-of-two who has served on Rochester upon Medway City Council for three years.

As an Indian and a woman, she welcomed the push to encourage more women and ethnic minorities into local government, where older white men are still the norm. "Local councillors tend to be people who have been involved with local parties for years. Once they get in they tend to stay there," she said.

"Having more women does give it a different perspective. Women are less confrontational than the men." But local authorities need more than a change in their physical complexion, she said. "If young people are going to come into local councils, I don't think many of them are going to be willing to hang around for years waiting for their turn to come as happens now. Ability has to come into it."

Ms Sofat also believes local government itself needs re-thinking. "For a long time

now, power has been taken away from local government. Budgets are determined from the centre and there is very little room for manoeuvre." She wants councils to be able to raise more money locally if residents want that.

"A lot of people get involved with the Labour Party to try to improve the lot of people who can't help themselves," she said. "I welcome a lot of the changes that are being introduced, but hope we don't lose sight of what we're about."

Labour retreats over union rights

Labour "modernisers" are being forced to retreat from proposals to water down a manifesto commitment on trade union recognition in the workplace.

The manifesto says: "People should be free to join or not to join a union."

"Where they do decide to join, and where a majority of the relevant workforce vote in a bal-

lot for the union to represent them, the union should be recognised. This promotes stable and orderly industrial relations."

But alarm bells rang throughout the Labour Party last week, when Adair Turner, director-general of the CBI, said he believed that ministers favoured his own tough interpretation of the manifesto

pledge - that a majority of those entitled to vote, rather than a majority of those voting, was needed for recognition to be given.

A senior government source told the *Independent* that he suspected Mr Turner had been given a nod-and-wink by No 10, and if that was the case there would be a "battle royal" to get the union rights put through on

the more lax, union-led interpretation of a majority of employees voting.

However, a Downing Street spokesman said: "We will act in accordance with the manifesto." That was immediately seen by insiders as a hint of concession to come, recognising the powerful forces now being mobilised against the CBI line.

— Anthony Bevins

Party donors may be forced into the open

Anonymous donations of more than £1,000 to any political party could be banned under proposals being considered by Lord Neill's Committee on Standards of Conduct in Public Life.

The Prime Minister, who has commissioned the committee's investigation into party funding, has already proposed the public identification of all donors of more than £5,000 - in line with

Labour's current practice. But Lord Neill told BBC radio's *In Committee* programme last night: "I think there is room for debate as to what the starting figure should be."

While the Government had suggested £5,000, Lord Neill said: "I am trying to keep an open mind until I have heard what everybody has to say, but my provisional feeling is that it is quite

a high figure... £1,000 might be a more reasonable limit."

Illustrating the enormous political sensitivity of the issue, Lord Neill was later attacked by John MacGregor, a Conservative MP and new committee member, who said the matter had not even been discussed yet.

"If the situation is prejudged without assessing any evidence it makes a mockery out

of public hearings," the former Leader of the Commons said.

Lord Neill also endorsed the feeling inside Government, shared by both Tony Blair and Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, that a cap on party political spending during elections could well be necessary - a move that would help parties live within their means.

— Anthony Bevins

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Child is the pawn in Brazil abortion battle

An 11-year-old girl has become a test case for opponents of abortion in Brazil. A wave of outrage has put her and her father under huge pressure. Phil Davison, Latin America correspondent, reports.

Being a minor, she is referred to in the media only as M. But everyone in Brazil knows her surname, Oliveira, that she was raped last year when she was 10 and that she intends to have a baby in the spring.

A waif of a girl with braided hair, M has become a reluctant figurehead for the anti-abortion lobby in Brazil, even in the rest of South America. Under Brazilian law, she could have aborted her foetus for either of two reasons - because of the rape and because

BY PHIL DAVISON

of the dangers she faces in giving birth at the age of 11. But Catholic priests and other anti-abortionists persuaded her father against it.

M, whose face in profile is widely known around the nation, usually half-hidden by her favourite plastic doll, said she was raped last August by a 38-year-old farm labourer called Roberto Celeste in the town of Sapucaia, 180 miles north of Rio de Janeiro. He has since disappeared.

She said she hid her secret from her father, vegetable-farmer Walter Oliveira, for as long as she could, saying she was suffering from a stomach upset or cramps.

When she began vomiting and her condition became obvious in November, her father opted for an abortion. He asked local judge Luiz Mangabeira Cardoso for permission, M was taken to a Rio hospital for health checks and the judge ruled the abortion could go ahead. But a day before it was due last December,



A boy tries to catch the Pope's eye yesterday. The Catholic church in Brazil has put huge pressure on girl 'M' to have her baby Photograph: Reuters

after news of her case received nationwide publicity and just after her 11th birthday, anti-abortionists marched on Sapucaia and called for the judge to reverse his decision. "Killing is not the way to teach people respect for life," they shouted. Catholic priest Father Luiz Carlos Lodi de la Cruz, citing statements made in Rio two months earlier by Pope John Paul, told Mr Oliveira and M that abortion was "an abominable crime, the shame of humanity".

Another priest showed father and daughter a videotape of the US-produced film *The Silent Scream*, which includes graphic images of a foetus being aborted. "What crime has that unborn child committed?" he asked.

A leading Brazilian obstetrician travelled to Sapucaia and told Mr Oliveira that letting his daughter give birth would not endanger her life. The Oliveiras were convinced.

"I feared that giving birth would kill her. She is still so small," Mr Oliveira told a reporter from the *Miami Herald* in Sapucaia last week.

"Her uterus can't be fit to bear a child. What really makes you crazy is one person saying one thing and another saying another. It was hard to know what was right, except that 95 people were saying one thing and only five were saying something else."

"I'm happy now," said M. "It was my father who wanted me to have the abortion. I didn't want to have it."

Mr Oliveira, who earns only £15 a week from growing tomatoes and aubergines, was at first unsure how he was going to pay for the medical care his daughter now needs. But national fame brought gifts and cash donations from Catholic, evangelical and pro-life groups and the media.

M will be one of tens of thousands of children to give birth in Brazil this year. Sociologists predict the figure will be higher than ever this year because of the influence of the Pope's visit and his hard-hitting attack on "the forces of evil" - divorce and abortion.

A 1940 Brazilian law authorises abortion in cases of rape or a threat to the mother's life. But in reality, as the pro-choice camp has lost ground in recent years and the anti-abortionists have kept up the pressure, many state hospitals turn away such women even if they show up with written court authorisation.

Congress is debating a new Bill which would oblige the state hospitals to perform such special case abortions but conservative Catholic congressmen have so far blocked it.

Greek Cypriot presidential race too close to call

Greek Cypriots voted in a neck-and-neck presidential election seen as crucial to the divided island's reunification talks and its hopes of joining the European Union. None of the seven candidates was expected to win an outright majority and opinion polls showed incumbent conservative Glafcos Clerides, 78, would most likely face independent challenger George Iakovou, 59, a former foreign minister, in a run-off on 15 February. — Reuters, Nicosia

Anti-Nazi protest

About 1,000 left-wing youths marched in Magdeburg to protest against neo-Nazi violence on the first anniversary of the murder of a teenager who strayed into right-wing turf. During the march, from the train station to the graveyard where Frank Boettcher is buried, demonstrators threw rocks at police and journalists and broke windows. A massive police presence, however, prevented fights between left-wingers and neo-Nazi groups in the east German town. Boettcher had been waiting at a tram stop when he was kicked in the head and knifed on the night of 8 February 1997. — AP, Magdeburg

Imelda enters election

Imelda Marcos, former first lady of the Philippines, who is battling to stay out of prison, formally entered her name in the May presidential race and vowed to use the Marcos riches to bail the Philippines out of its economic crisis. The widow of late dictator Ferdinand Marcos walked on her knees inside a Manila church and prostrated herself at the altar after filing her candidacy papers in a nearby election office. "She always does that in critical moments of her life," an aide said of the once powerful woman known around the world for her extravagant shopping sprees. "My decision [to run] was triggered by the economic crisis we now experience... I want to remove our people from our economic crisis by using the wealth of the late president Ferdinand E Marcos," she said in a statement. The Supreme Court recently upheld a 1993 trial court's verdict sentencing her to 12 years in jail for violating the anti-corruption law, bringing her closer to imprisonment. — Reuters, Manila

Men fail to tell of HIV

A study in the United States published today found that three out of four women infected with HIV told their sexual partners, while about half the number of infected men disclosed their condition. Researchers at two New England city hospitals found that only 52 per cent of men as opposed to 78 per cent of women told their sexual partners of their HIV status.

Of those who did not disclose they were infected, only 42 per cent said they always used a condom during sexual intercourse.

The researchers interviewed HIV patients who reported having sexual partners during the previous six months and found that among those who had one steady partner, 21 per cent failed to disclose their status. "There are powerful forces working in favour of non-disclosure," the researchers said. "There are the psychological consequences of disclosure, especially the risk of rejection."

— Reuters, Boston

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White House pressures Starr over Lewinsky leaks

Things are looking up for Bill Clinton. Lawyers' accusations are flying between the White House and the US independent prosecutor's office. And, reports Mary Dejevsy, the President's approval ratings are shooting up.

The prosecutor, Kenneth Starr, will today find himself the target of two legal actions

that call into question his methods and motives. Mr Starr is in charge of a series of inquiries into the President's activities, including allegations that he had an affair with a White House trainee, Monica Lewinsky, and told her to lie about it.

The first lawsuit, for contempt, is to be lodged today in Washington by David Kendall, the head of Mr Clinton's legal team in the Lewinsky case and relates to allegations that leaks from the Lewinsky inquiry originated in Mr Starr's office.

Leaked information has appeared almost daily in the US media in the three weeks since the allegations were first published, and while the White House has dismissed some of the material as false, many of the statements have gone unchallenged. Mr Kendall described the leaks as "intolerably unfair" and the prosecutor as "out of control".

The second suit, lodged in California, is being prepared by Ms Lewinsky's lawyer, who accuses Mr Starr of going back on an immunity agreement

for his client. According to the lawyer, William Ginsburg, Mr Starr agreed to grant Ms Lewinsky immunity from prosecution for perjury if she decided to change sworn testimony she gave about her relationship with Mr Clinton.

According to Mr Ginsburg, he and Mr Starr had finalised an immunity deal a week ago. But, says Mr Ginsburg, Mr Starr subsequently added conditions, including a face-to-face interview with Ms Lewinsky.

In a furious statement at the weekend, Mr Ginsburg ac-

cused Mr Starr's office of trying to put pressure on his client to lie. Unofficial reports say that Ms Lewinsky is prepared to testify to a sexual relationship with Mr Clinton - something she initially denied - but will not say that he told her to lie about it.

Some observers see the twin lawsuits against Mr Starr's office as an attempt to build on public criticism of Mr Starr and discredit his investigation. According to an opinion poll conducted for NBC television and the Wall Street Journal,

published yesterday, 64 per cent of those asked thought Mr Starr was using the investigation for partisan, political purposes. Mr Clinton's approval rating on the other hand has risen still further, to 79 per cent - a 9 per cent increase on the previous week.

A new lawsuit would complicate matters and could delay the Lewinsky investigation. Any attempt to oust Mr Starr as independent prosecutor, however, could be counterproductive, as it could give the impression that the President was above the law.



Kenneth Starr: Accused of going back on agreement

Albright and Cook move close to point of no return

Robin Cook and Madeleine Albright both stepped up their rhetoric offensive on Iraq yesterday, as the prospect of real military action approached. Anthony Bevins and Andrew Marshall report.

The brutality of the Iraqi regime was so great that they had shot 1,200 long-term prisoners to solve a problem of prison overcrowding, Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, alleged yesterday.

He told the BBC television *Breakfast with Frost* programme that he had no intelligence to suggest that chemical or biological weapons could be used in retaliatory terrorist attacks on the United Kingdom; that was much more likely in Middle East countries.

But Mr Cook added that there was a real risk involved. "It is a very real point that if he [Saddam Hussein] acquires these chemical and biological agents, he doesn't necessarily have to deliver them ... by military attack," he said. "It could be ... delivered in a terrorist manner by people travelling through the area ..."

"Do remember we are dealing with a very brutal, even psychopathic regime. In the last two months, they decided that their prisons were overcrowded. They solved that by taking out every prisoner with over 15 years of a sentence, and shooting them ... A government that behaves with that kind of brutality in its own country is not a government you can leave in possession of these terror weapons."

The comments of Mr Cook, and of Madeleine Albright, his US colleague, show that the rhetoric offensive against Iraq is gearing up. "Will it be substantial, will it be sustained, will

it be heavy?" a television interviewer asked the US Secretary of State yesterday. "It will be all those things," she responded.

The military preparation is also escalating. Western defence sources in Kuwait said that British support aircraft had started arriving in Kuwait on Saturday with spare parts and support equipment for eight British Tomado bombers which are due to deploy in Kuwait today. Six US F-117A stealth bombers are also due in Kuwait which has agreed in principle to allow Western aircraft to operate from its territory.

But there are serious doubts about support outside London and Washington for any attacks. Ms Albright said she was confident of support from Saudi Arabia. "I have confidence and trust that the Saudi government will support us if force is necessary," she said. But the *Arab News* quoted Prince Sultan, the Saudi Defence Minister, as saying that his country was much more critical of the move. "We'll not agree and we are against striking Iraq as a people and as a nation."

William Cohen, the US Defense Secretary, is due to meet King Fahd this week during a tour of six Gulf states.

Mr Cook said the statement of Saudi opposition would be studied with care. "We are not asking Saudi Arabia for the capacity to mount strike aircraft from Saudi Arabia," the Foreign Secretary said. "I don't know that there's that much difference in principle between us," he added. "I mean, I don't want to strike Iraq; I want an outcome which enables inspectors to get on with their vital job of stopping Saddam developing these arsenals of terror."

Tony Benn, the former Labour Cabinet minister, said yesterday that any massive air attack on Iraq would isolate London and Washington from



the majority of world opinion, and would have the gravest consequences.

"Despite all that has been said about attempts to find a diplomatic solution," he said, "no American, or British minister has gone to Baghdad, unlike the Russian, French, Turkish and other governments, who have sent senior ministers for talks there." Mr Benn himself yesterday sent an appeal to Tariq Aziz, the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, asking him to explore possible solutions to the crisis.

He asked whether, if all UN sanctions, except for military equipment, were lifted at once, Iraq could immediately agree to allow UN inspectors to operate freely in accordance with the UN Security Council resolution. The US has given no time

limit for Saddam Hussein to comply with its demands, though *The Independent* reported last week that 17 February was a likely date. Asked how much time Saddam had to comply fully with UN resolutions, Ms Albright said: "It's not days and it's not months - it's in the weeks category. We want to make sure that we have explored all the diplomatic options."

Corsicans down tools in memory of prefect

The island of Corsica will close down for 15 minutes this morning, in protest against the murder of the most senior French government official in the province last Friday night. John Lichfield in Paris reports.

Operation "Île Morte" (dead island) - a cessation of all but the most essential activity, demanded by trades unions and most political parties - will be widely respected. Most Corsicans have been outraged and distressed by the assassination of Claude Erignac, the island's popular prefect, as he walked unprotected in the streets of Ajaccio.

This is the first time that the Mediterranean island's 24 years of mostly low-level, and frequently absurd, civil conflict has claimed such a senior victim. Two suspects, of Moroccan origin, remained in police custody yesterday. A third man arrested was freed. None of the island's jigsaw of mutually-loathing separatist groups have admitted responsibility for the attack.

The assassination of Mr Erignac, 59, as he was about to go to a concert with his wife, is assumed to be a product of the increasing disarray of the many factions seeking independence from France. It was widely interpreted on the island as a sign of the weakness, not the strength, of the separatist movement, which is expected to perform disastrously in local elections next month.

It may, none the less, signal the start of a more murderous phase in the conflict. Two weeks ago, one of the most militant nationalist groups - The National Front for the Liberation of Corsica, Historic Wing - announced that it was abandoning an eight-month-old ceasefire. But the political party associated with this group joined the general condemnation of Mr Erignac's murder at the weekend.

The rival "Habitual Wing" of the National Front for the Liberation of Corsica gave up violence long ago. The finger of blame points at a number of smaller groups, which have split from the nationalist mainstream in recent years.

The two Moroccans under questioning yesterday were arrested shortly after the murder on Friday night. Initial forensic tests produced no evidence that either of the men had recently fired a gun. Police are, however, working on the theory that the Moroccans, who are believed to be small-time criminals, may have been hired by one of the separatist groups.

Operation Southern Watch: A US Hornet set for take off from the USS George Washington in the Persian Gulf. Photograph: Reuters

US-based dissident arrested in China

A prominent US-based Chinese dissident has been arrested. He had entered the mainland under a false name as part of a plan to set up a pro-democracy organisation inside China.

The detention of Wang Bingzhang, 50, who has lived in America for several years, will cast a shadow over today's start of an unprecedented three-week fact-finding mission to China of three US religious leaders, the first time such a visit has been permitted by the Chinese government.

The first of the three leaders arrived in Peking yesterday, for an 18-day visit which will include Tibet. Rabbi Arthur Schneier, from New York, will be joined by Reverend Don Argue, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, and Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, of the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Newark. President Jiang Zemin extended the invitation during his visit to Washington last autumn.

By coincidence or otherwise, a Christian activist, Gan Feng, 29, was released at the weekend after serving a two-and-a-half-year sentence.

According to documents ob-

tained by a human rights group a few years ago, Mr Wang has been on a Chinese list of exiled dissidents to be refused re-entry to China, but was not one of those who was supposed to be arrested on entry. However, Mr Wang last month outwitted border security guards by sneaking into China from Macau, using a false name. He was arrested on Friday along with a mainland-based mathematics teacher, Wang Tingjin, in Bangbu, Anhui province.

Reuters news agency said the men were on their way to photocopy documents.

One of Mr Wang's US friends, Fu Shenqi, yesterday said Mr Wang had come to China to take part in a secret meeting this month in north China to set up a new opposition group, to be called the Justice Party, which would campaign for democracy in China. "Wang Bingzhang is prepared to go to jail," Mr Fu told Reuters.

China's greatest fear is of co-ordinated action between exiled dissidents and the few remaining activists still at large inside China.

— Teresa Poole, Peking

Chicken is back on HK menu

Chickens were back on sale again in Hong Kong yesterday, for the first time in six weeks. The hunger for the birds was so great that they were snapped up at exorbitant prices despite lingering fears over a bird flu that has killed six people.

Vendors complained that only 35,000 birds were imported on Saturday when the government lifted a ban on live chickens from China. Before the ban was imposed on 24 December, Hong Kong used to import 80,000 birds daily from China.

No new flu cases have been reported in Hong Kong since the government slaughtered all the territory's 1.4 million chickens in late December. Of the 18 people stricken with the virus since last year, only two remain in hospital.

The birds were fetching up to Hong Kong \$90 (£7.29) each, more than 10 per cent more than before the ban. Retailers said wholesalers were charging them about 30 per cent more.

— AP, Hong Kong

First rescue teams reach quake area

A Red Cross plane packed with emergency medical and water sanitation supplies managed to land yesterday near the site of the earthquake which hit Afghanistan last week.

The massive earthquake, which killed between 2,000 and 4,000 villagers in the mountainous Takhar province, struck last Wednesday night. Hundreds of bodies remain to be dug out from under landslides and collapsed mud huts. There may still be survivors buried in the rubble. Fifteen thousand families are said to have been made homeless. But only now are the first foreign rescue teams arriving in the area.

Many people died in their beds as their houses collapsed and many others were swept away in landslides. So remote is this part of the country that word of the disaster reached Kabul, 200 miles to the south, 48 hours later. Aid agencies have been struggling to reach the place ever since.

The problems are numerous. There have been a number of powerful aftershocks. Afghanistan's Taliban government which is at war with the anti-Tal-

iban alliance in the north-east of the country is said to have bombed Rustaq, capital of Takhar province, in recent days. The Taliban have been slow to permit planes to fly to the region from Kabul. The region is in the grip of winter: the cold will have maximised casualties and makes landing on primitive air strips hazardous or impossible. Another Red Cross plane flying to the region yesterday was forced to turn back because of bad weather.

The other route into the region is across the Tajikistan border to north, but the border guards have so far refused to admit rescue teams.

Uncertainty surrounds the number of casualties left by the quake. Afghanistan's Red Crescent released a preliminary figure of 2,150 dead.

Two doctors from Médecins Sans Frontières, who were the first foreigners on the scene when they arrived on Saturday, said they had already treated 400 casualties and that deaths greatly exceeded injuries because the disaster had occurred at night.

— Peter Popham, Delhi

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هكذا من الأصل

Borneo's forests burn on the bonfire of big business

Forest burning in Indonesia is no accident: nearly all the fires are man made. The real culprits are the huge industrial conglomerates which have encouraged the development of the rainforests. Our correspondent reports from East Kalimantan.

The strangest thing about the jungle near Muara Nayan, stranger than the smell of the air and the blank whiteness of the sky, is how autumnal it looks, closer to Hyde Park in October than the tropics. The smell is one of autumn bonfires and the tall trees are bare of leaves, or shedding them onto the road in orange piles.

But we are just 40 miles from the equator, and the temperature here is close to 38C. These are tropical hardwoods, not elms and sycamores, and we are in the forests of Borneo, eight hours from the nearest city, where it is hot and humid all the year round and there are no seasons.

The puzzle is answered a few yards off the dusty road, in what used to be a swampy grove of hardwoods and fruit trees. Now, for a few hundred yards on all sides, it is the skeleton of a forest - the swamp water has thickened to viscous mud, scattered with the fallen bodies of blackened trees and covered in a layer of white ash.

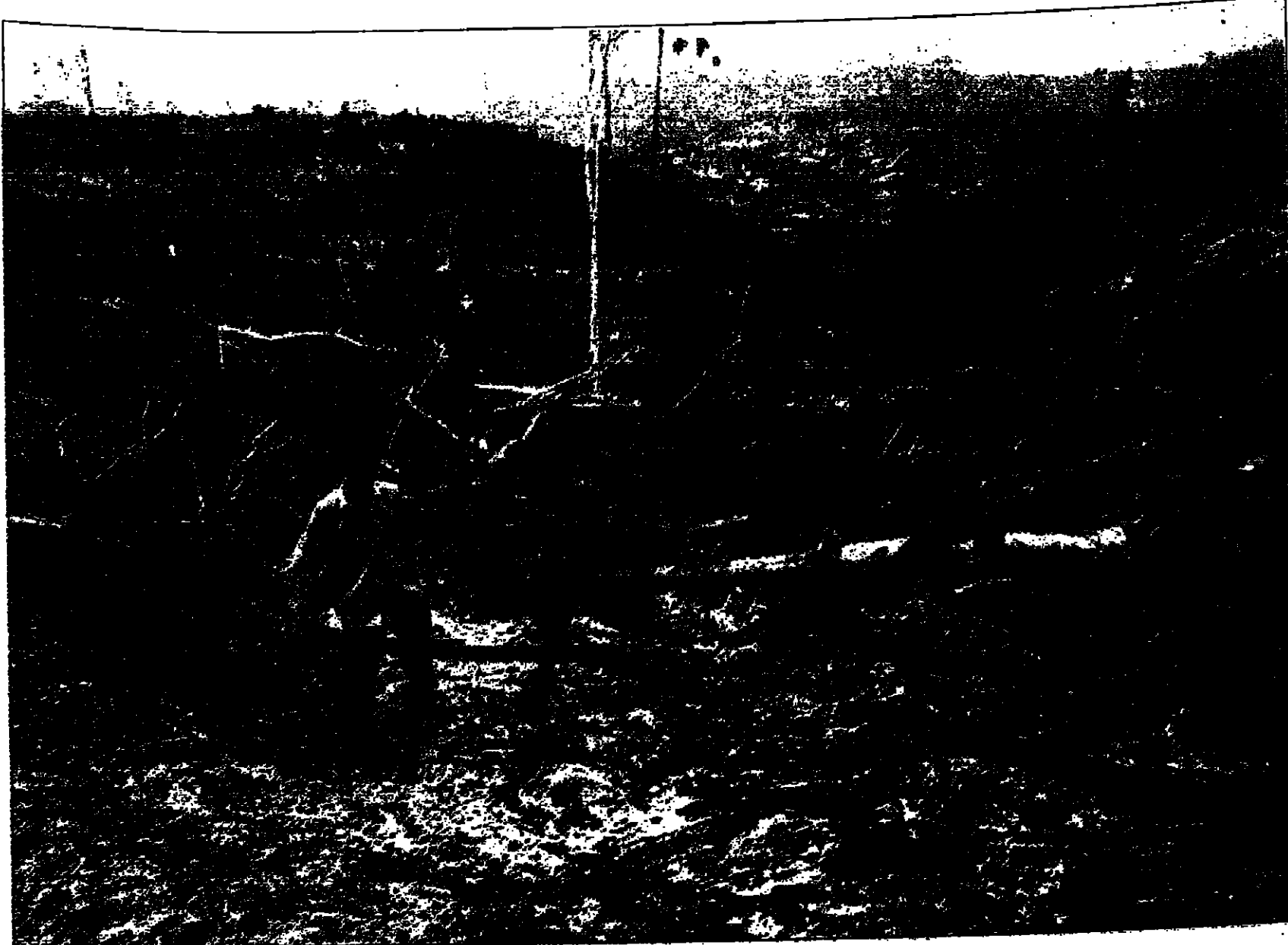
Even from the unburned vegetation lines of smoke rise into a dazzling white sky in which the sun is visible only as a pale orange disc. In an area the size of a football pitch, there are no insects or birds, no frogs or snakes, and no monkeys.

The Dayak tribesman who used to tend this land is at a loss. "It began three weeks ago in the middle of the night," he says, "and the first we knew was the smoke the next morning."

"We came quickly, but the fire had spread so far, and there is no water. So we had to let it burn." His durian trees, his mangoes, jackfruit and rambutans were all destroyed. "Every year, there were fruit there, for my family to eat and to sell in the market. I have lost my income, my livelihood."

In a normal year, he could rely on his rice fields - but with almost no rain since last year, the harvest is doomed to be a failure. His family have taken to weaving traditional textiles and making Dayak wood carvings - but the foreign tourists who might have bought them have been scared away by news of the enveloping smoke.

A worse and bigger fire three months ago burned several years' worth of rattan, the pliable cane which is the other local standby. But if this looks like a natural disaster, the villagers do not see it that way. "There is no proof," says the village headman, "and it is possible that some of these



Wipe out: The ruin of farmers creates a labour force of needy workers for the companies affiliated to President Suharto's family

Photograph: Reuters



are accidents. But in the past, even when it was as dry, there were never so many fires as this. They have begun only after the companies came in, the companies and their politics. But we cannot prove it, so we keep silent."

Borneo is burning again. In November and December, the rains came at last, bringing respite from the fires which burned all summer, closing airports, causing deadly shipping and aviation accidents, and choking millions of people in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand with the so-called "haze".

But in East Kalimantan, the biggest province of Indonesian Borneo, it has rained for no more than a few hours since the beginning of the year, at what is supposed to be the height of the wet season. Helicopter inspections last week revealed fires covering some 15-20,000 hectares in this province alone, and with no rains in

sight the situation can only get worse. Indonesia, home of some of the world's biggest tropical rain forests, is once again on the way to becoming its biggest bonfire. But if the effects of the blaze are obvious enough, its causes are as complex and murky as Indonesia's politics, a product of greed, social engineering and the inter- action of modern industry with a traditional way of life which has existed peacefully here for centuries.

If there is one thing which everyone agrees on, it is that almost all the fires burning here are man-made, the result of deliberate burning rather than accidents with cigarette ends or spontaneous combustion. For centuries, fire has been an essential tool of the slash-and-burn agri-

culture of the Dayak tribes who still populate Borneo's interior, as well as the "transmigrants", more recent arrivals, freighted in by the government in a controversial programme to ease congestion in poorer, more arid islands.

The former have lived here for thousands of years and their experience of the forest is enshrined in a detailed set of traditional precepts and religious rituals governing the use of fire. The latter, who often come to

farming with no previous experience, lack this expertise. "The Dayak people don't cause forest fires," says Ludwig Schindler, a German expert who heads the Integrated Forest Fire Management (IFFM) project in

the East Kalimantan capital, Samarinda.

"They know when it's too dry and dangerous to burn. But the outsiders don't have the close relationship with the forest, and they're careless. A man might want to clear half a hectare for himself and end up burning 200."

But the third and crucial element of the problem is the hundreds of commercial companies - rubber and palm oil planters, extractors of timber, gold and coal - who have descended on Borneo since the late 1960s, hacking and exporting its rainforests, which can be found in their virgin state only in the deep interior and in a few reserves.

For these companies, just as for the small farmers, burning is the quickest way of clearing forest, both in order to clear land earmarked for mining or planting, and to convert logged land for agricultural use.

The presence of these companies has

created wounding rifts, as damaging to the local culture as they are to the environment. Many of the companies are affiliated to massive Indonesian conglomerates, run by the immediate family and cronies of President Suharto. Granted licenses by the central government, they arrive to "negotiate" with the local people who have almost no legal rights to their land, despite their ancient history.

Dayaks in Lempunah, a village near Muara Nayan, have been offered lump sums to exchange their traditional land for a small share in a palm oil plantation. So far they have held out but ever since the offer was made the village has been stricken by mysterious fires.

Evidence is sketchy, although foreign experts visiting the area say that they have seen fires being started by men who, when questioned, openly admit that they are acting on behalf of palm oil companies. And coincidentally or not, the loss of forest land benefits the companies in several ways.

With their rattan and fruit trees destroyed, locals are more likely to yield to the temptation of a windfall buy-out. The company may pay less in compensation for burned land than for productive forest - and the ruin of farmers creates a labour force of needy workers. "The company pays just 6,000 rupiah [35 pence] a day," says the Dayak man who lost his fruit trees. "But

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Until Saturday February 28th, the following establishments are offering readers a two course lunch or early evening supper for just £10 per person.

How to Book

To participate in the offer simply collect one token (tokens will be printed every day until Saturday February 28th) and then telephone the restaurant of your choice quoting yourself as an Independent diner. On your arrival at the restaurant you should present your token in order to qualify for the offer. Each token is valid for a complete table booking. The tokens will be valid for one week only, and will be dated accordingly. To continue to participate in the offer, simply collect a token from the week in which you wish to dine. Pre-booking is essential and all bookings are subject to availability.

A special discount is available on selected items in the Bluebird and Le Pont de la Tour shops on presentation of the token.

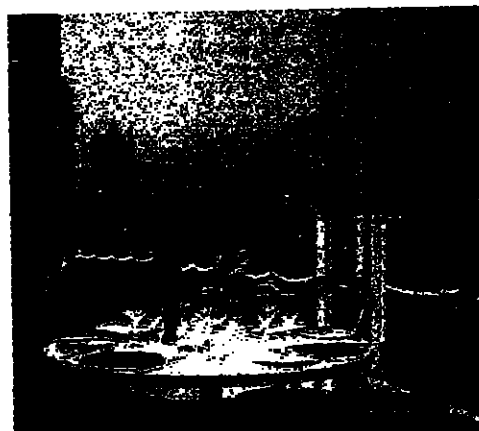


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Look to the skies – it's eclipse time again

Shadows become unusually crisp, the temperature falls, the sky darkens and turns an eerie silvery-gray, while animals, believing dusk has fallen, begin to howl and wail. That's when the scientists really get interested: it means a solar eclipse is underway. Don Falk on preparations for the next big one.

In the world of science, few events bring the professional and the amateur together. The astronomer peering through a high-powered microscope has entered a world beyond the reach of the hobbyist; a bird-watcher may stop to admire a majestic (but common) blue heron, a sight that elicits only a yawn from the ornithologist. In astronomy, however, the two groups enjoy common ground. And of all the sights the heavens can offer, none holds as much appeal as a total eclipse of the sun.

That's why thousands of astronomy enthusiasts, both professional and amateur, will be heading for the Caribbean this month. The eclipse of 26 February will last more than four minutes, and be one of the best of the decade. The spectacle will be visible across a narrow ribbon of sea and land stretching from Colombia to Antigua.

A solar eclipse occurs when the moon passes between the sun and the earth, blotting out the sun in the middle of the day. Total eclipses occur every few years; however, because they're visible only from a small region of the earth's surface, putting oneself in the "path of totality" often means travelling to some out-of-the-way location.

The last two total eclipses, for example, were visible only from eastern Asia – too far away for many budget-minded amateurs. Prime viewing sites for February's eclipse, in comparison, are relatively accessible. It's also a kind of "sneak preview" for the much-anticipated eclipse of August 1999, which will be visible from south-west England.

The moon's shadow will be just 150km (94 miles) wide as it cuts across Central America and the Caribbean. Only within this narrow path will viewers see the total eclipse; those farther afield will see a partial eclipse. The path of totality crosses southern Panama, northern Colombia and Venezuela, and the islands of Aruba, Curaçao, Montserrat, Guadeloupe and Antigua.

"A solar eclipse is one of the most spectacular things in nature," says Francisco Diego, an astrophysicist at University College London and a veteran of nine solar eclipses. Diego, like many observers, finds he keeps coming back for a repeat performance. "Once you see the first one, you want to see more."

Though he shares the passion of the amateurs, Diego will be doing serious research when he observes February's eclipse from Guadeloupe. He'll be taking high-resolu-



Darkness at noon: preparing for a total eclipse in Saraburi province in Thailand in 1995

tion photographs of the corona, the sun's tenuous outer atmosphere. Because the sun's surface is millions of times brighter than the corona, this outer region can only be studied during the fleeting moments of a total eclipse. Diego hopes to plot the precise shape of the corona, and compare his results with measurements made from other locations.

American astronomer Jay Pasachoff, meanwhile, wants to find out why the corona has a temperature of more than one million degrees Celsius, compared with just 6,000 degrees on the surface below. "It's one of the basic unsolved problems in astrophysics," says Pasachoff. One theory is that loops of gas in the corona – held in place by the sun's magnetic field – play a role in the transfer of heat. These loops are believed to oscillate, moving energy from one layer to another. Using an ultra-sensitive electronic camera, he plans to record images of the corona at a rate of 10 pictures per second. The results will show

any high-frequency motion in the coronal loops.

John Parkinson, of Sheffield Hallam University, has what sounds like a much simpler task: he wants to measure the size of the sun. The method sounds simple, too. Because the moon's diameter is known to a great degree of precision, you just have to time the duration of totality as accurately as possible, and do some basic trigonometry. "Essentially, you use the moon as a ruler," he says. To perform the calculation, you also have to know your precise location; Parkinson will be using a GPS (global positioning system) when he observes the February eclipse from the island of Curaçao.

This will be Parkinson's seventh eclipse, and he notes that getting to the site rather than observing the event is often the greatest challenge. In 1981, he and his team travelled to eastern Siberia. "We lived in a woodcutter's cottage in the middle of the forest for about five days, and we lived on

sardines and salami," Parkinson recalls. "We had a great time."

That kind of enthusiasm, rarely heard from the pros, is something keen amateurs display every time they head for an eclipse. For Don Hladik, an amateur astronomer living in Calgary, Canada, chasing the moon's shadow has been a habit since 1979, when he saw his first solar eclipse from Manitoba. "I was totally blown away by the beauty of it," Hladik says. From that moment, he's been hooked: February's eclipse will be his sixth.

Those who have seen it agree that the sight of the totally-eclipsed sun is one of the most awe-inspiring displays nature can offer. An eclipse begins as the moon appears to take a "bite" out of the solar disk. The bite slowly grows larger, until the sun has been reduced to a thin crescent. Shadows become unusually crisp. Perforations in tree leaves, acting as pinhole cameras, project thousands of images of the sun on the ground. As the moon's shadow sweeps

closer, the temperature falls. The sky darkens and turns an eerie silvery-gray. Many animals, believing dusk has fallen, begin to howl and wail. Veterans of eclipse cruises tell of dolphins leaping out of the water as the start of totality draws near. Early on, many would surely have trembled in fear.

Finally, the sun disappears completely behind the moon, which becomes an incredible "black hole" in the sky, surrounded by the pearly-white glow of the corona. Often, huge red flares – known as solar prominences – can be seen streaming from the sun's surface. Meanwhile, the brighter stars and planets have become visible, while the glow of a "360-degree sunset" colours the horizon on all sides. Midday has become night. As Don Hladik puts it, a total eclipse of the sun is "one of those things you have to see before you leave this planet."

Don Falk is a science journalist based in Toronto, Canada.

TECHNOQUEST

The bald truth about fungi

Questions for this column may be submitted by e-mail to sci.net@campus.bt.com

You can also visit the Technoquest World Wide Web site at <http://www.campus.bt.com/CampusWorld/pub/ScienceNet>

Q How do fungi differ from plants?
Fungi are quite like plants: they form complex, sometimes branching structures, they cannot move independently and they cannot respond to their environment as animals can.

The main difference lies in the way these two sorts of organism get their food. Plants can photosynthesise, using the light energy of the sun to fix carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, to form sugars. Fungi can't photosynthesise – they do not produce any chlorophyll. Instead, they secrete powerful enzymes to break down the material of living or dead organisms. This becomes their food, which they absorb through their cell walls rather than ingesting it as animals do. Fungi therefore have to grow in or on their potential food. Since they surround themselves with food-digesting enzymes, it is hardly surprising to find that their cell walls include a very tough protective material, chitin. (This material is also found in animal exoskeletons).

Q Why do men go bald?

It's because of a sex hormone, testosterone, which occurs naturally in all our bodies. All men produce about the same amount of testosterone – about 10 times as much as women – but some are more vulnerable to its effects than others. Testosterone causes baldness in the hair follicles that are sensitive to one of the hormone's breakdown products, DHT.

Every follicle tends to produce hair in phases – a growing phase followed by a shorter resting phase, after which the hair is shed, then a new one grows. DHT makes the follicles "rest" sooner and eventually shut down to become dormant. Treatments do exist – but you have to use them every day or the regrown hair just falls out again.

Questions and answers provided by Science Line's Dial-a-Scientist (0345 600444)

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THEORETICALLY ...

In-flight meals/herbal highs/Aids/mobile energy

Passengers setting off on long-haul flights have to pack carefully to avoid heavy fines for excess weight but the bar-tailed godwit goes a stage further. Having stuffed itself to its wings in preparation for its 11,000km migratory flight from Alaska to New Zealand, it destroys part of its gut, liver and kidneys to save weight.

The wading birds, about the size of a gull, binge before they migrate, until more than half their body weight is fat. Dutch and US scientists who compared organ weights of the birds report in *New Scientist* that they were reduced in size by up to 25 per cent. Digestive organs are not required during the flight but they keep just enough so that when they land they can process food and rebuild their internal organs.

A few herbs, and a very big business
Seven million Germans regularly take Hypericum Perforatum as a herbal antidepressant. In the US, sales of Ginkgo extracts and ginseng exceed \$50m. China earns at least \$400m a year from the export of herbal medicines. This is the financial backdrop to an international conference on medicinal and aromatic

plants which was held in Mendoza, Argentina. It heard that new anti-microbial compounds had been isolated from Chilean plants and a new type of cytotoxic compound isolated from a Podocarpus species had attracted the interest of the National Institutes of Cancer Research in the US.

You need never miss your stop again
People who habitually nod off on the train home and miss their stop may soon be able to buy an intelligent alarm that will jerk them awake at the appropriate moment. Clive Wallington of Colchester, who has patented the device, says in *New Scientist* that the guard's announcement is often too late, incoherent or not loud enough to wake a sleeping passenger. Using Wallington's invention, beacons by the track a few kilometres ahead of each station transmit a signal to the alarm. On receipt of the signal the alarm bleeps to wake the traveller.

Can Aids ever be finally eliminated?
Scientists disagree over whether the Aids virus can ever be entirely eradicated from the bodies of those infected. Dr Gary Tarkey, of the drug company Pharmacia and

Upjohn, told the Chicago Aids conference this week that the "evasive" virus would pose a "permanent challenge". "I personally think it is very unlikely that we will ever eradicate this virus from an infected patient." Not all scientists share this sceptical view. Dr B Hoehn and colleagues set out to test whether eradication of the virus was possible in 65 patients treated with the protease inhibitor Ritonavir, in combination with AZT and 3TC. In 17 of 18 patients who completed the course at one year the reduction in viral load was over 99.95 per cent – below the detectable level. They will be followed up for 18 months.

Another line on mobile phones
Mobile phones which need recharging every four days, rather than every two hours as now, could be on sale within a couple of years. A tiny fuel cell using methanol as its energy source has been developed by a former scientist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Last month a Californian venture capital company agreed to invest \$1m on developing a prototype.

— Jeremy Lawrence, Health Editor

TELL ME ABOUT ... tides

It's possible that the same process which leads the height of oceans to vary in a 12.5-hour cycle on Earth could hold the clue to whether life has begun on a remote moon of the planet Jupiter.

The cause of tides on the Earth is the moon. As it orbits our planet, its mass exerts a gravitational force on our planet, pulling objects towards it. But while solid objects aren't (significantly) deformed by that, liquid ones can be – and the oceans are.

The effect is that the oceans are pulled into an oval around the spherical Earth: slightly towards the moon overhead (high tide), with a corresponding peak on the other side of the world. Meanwhile there is a dip (low tide) at the "horizon" in the middle. As the moon moves, so does

the point of low and high tide. Effectively, as the Earth rotates, every 24 hours the moon appears in a different point in the sky – so the times of the tides change.

The change in sea level may not seem remarkable, but tidal effects are enormously powerful. The amount of sheer energy required to shift an entire ocean is colossal – hence various attempts to harness this energy with tidal barrages, for example in Cardiff Bay.

In a sense, that energy input is the reason why scientists looking for life elsewhere in the solar system are very interested by Europa, an ice-covered moon of Jupiter.

Scientists reckon that when it formed, Europa was composed of a mixture of rock and ice. As this coalesced, says



Love is a pair of iguana skin stilettos



DEBORAH ROSS
TALKS TO
MANOLO
BLAHNIK

The Manolo Blahnik shop is a discreet little thing just off the King's Road. No big sign outside. A bell to get in. A single, mint-green shoe with a heel like a mint-green icicle poised with great minimalist elegance in the window. This isn't Saks, you know. You have to know it's here. Madonna and Naomi and Kate and Bianca and Jerry and Paloma and Ivana and Cher all know it's here. Princess Diana knew it was here. As Manolo says: "Diana, she would say to me: 'Manolo, when I feel down I come to your little shop and get a little lift.'"

A Blahnik shoe is a spectacularly perpendicular thing. It'll give you a lift, alright. Inside? Just heavenly, frankly. Shoes displayed on fat, plumped-up, crushed velvet cushions. Shoes perched on burgundy and gilt boudoir chairs. There are lilac shoes, made of the finest leather, with straps like angel hair and another of those icicle heels. Shoes in scarlet silk, hand-decorated with teeny roses and bows. Pointy shoes in the softest, baby-blue suede.

Sequinned mules. Hand-beaded sandals. Stilettos in iguana-skin. Real iguana skin, Manolo? "Yes. But we no hurt the iguana. We kill the iguana in a very nice way." I don't know how you kill an iguana in a very nice way. Dizzy with excitement and expectation by now (Manolo has promised we'll play shoes!), I forget to ask. Presumably, though, it involves a clean blow to the skull as it's relaxing on a sun lounger, reading *Hello!* and wondering what to wear to the Oscars.

Manolo is here today, yes. He is half-Czech, half-Spanish, beautifully groomed, deliciously perfumed, around 60, and a great air-kisser, mwah, mwah! Dave Gilmour from Pink Floyd comes in with his wife Polly. "How lovely to see you, mwah, mwah!" Polly needs some new boots. She ruined her last Blahnik boots mucking out their horses. "OH, I love it that you ruin them mucking out the horses. See, my shoes not just for going from the pool to the limo!" The wife of a Russian attaché is in. "Madame, how are you? Mwah! Mwah!" Jane Pickering, a fashion editor from *Vogue* but currently on maternity leave, rings the bell. "Jane! Jane. How is the baby? Mwah! Mwah!" Jane tries on something very black and pointy and high. "What do you think, Manolo?" "I sink you have the most elegant feet, Jane. I sink they look wonderful." "What do you think?" she says, turning to me. "Just the thing for breast feeding." I say, "but then what do I know?" Not a lot, obviously, her look says, which is very confusing because, as ever, Manolo looking supremely elegant in my DMs.

Do you like Dr Martens, Manolo? "Well, I am sure they serve a purpose, although I can not think what that purpose is for the moment, ha ha." I say that, in terms of shoes with doctory connections, at least they are possibly one step more stylish than the Dr Scholl. no? "Oh, I wish I was the Dr Scholl. Everyone with the corns and the bunions, they come to me and make me the very rich." I like trainers a lot too, I add. Do you like trainers Manolo? "No, I hate the trainers. Ghastly! Filthy! Always dirty. Look at children from the United States. They have big deformed duck feet through wearing trainers." Can we play shoes now, Manolo? "Yes, Yes. Michael! Michael! Get the nice lady a shoe, please."

Michael, an assistant, brings me something very spindly and sparkling and spiky and strappy in neon-pink. I am immense-

ly excited now. I am Barbie. I am Cinderella on her way to the ball. Every Blahnik shoe is designed by Manolo himself, then hand-made in limited numbers from the finest materials. They go from £200 (a basic sandal) to more than £1,000 for an iguana job. (A Blahnik iguana's life may be a short one, but those copies of *Hello!* mount up.) I try the pink shoes on. Sadly, I am not used to walking on tippy-toe with an effectively vertical foot. I don't do limos or Oscar ceremonies or even Harvey Nichols, only the corner shop when I run out of fags and then my fluffy, bri-nylon, Dougal slippers tend to do. I am utterly hopeless. I have no arches. My foot cannot follow the steep gradient of the sole. Manolo says: "Not really you, I sink." Jane says "hum" pityingly. The Russian lady goes "tee hee", which is possibly Russian for "tee hee". Manolo suggests we go for our lunch. "But another style might suit me better," I cry desperately. "Lunch," he repeats. "I just need some practice," I add tearfully.

"Lunch. We come back and play some more later, okay?" We walk round the corner, to Terence Conran's Bluebird restaurant. Manolo walks close. He is wearing a pure cashmere coat, the sort you just want to melt into every time it brushes against your arm. He is a magnificent gentleman. A hand in the small of my back when we have to cross the road. He opens doors, helps with my coat, pulls out my chair. Later, he pays the bill, even though I try to insist otherwise. "Are you out your bloody mind?" he cries. "You bloody stupid. You my guest." As an ardent feminist, I find all this so patronising and reprehensible that, should he ever ask me for a second date, I will have no option but to accept directly.

Sweetly, he affects not to take himself too seriously. The following day, he says, he has to go to America to receive some award from the fashion industry for "services to high heels." He thinks this enormously comical. He chuckles until tears come to his eyes. "Service to the bloody shoes, ha! Who cares about the bloody shoe!" But of course he does,

passionately. Shoes are his life. They could make him a lot richer and a lot more famous that he already is. He's had a lot of offers over the years. A handbag range. Manolo? A home furnishings range. Manolo? Oven-to-tableware, Manolo? No. Never. The shoe is the thing for him. He even says later: "Oh, yes, I anxious all the time. Will people like my new collection? Am I repeating myself?" There is little else in his life.

Do you have relationships, Manolo? "I have good friends, yes." No, I mean sexual relationships? "Ah. No. I sorry to have to say this, but I never enjoy the sex and find it repulsive. Why, I do not know." You're celibate, then? "Yes." No urges ever? "I have moments when I get hot flush-

When Diana wanted to steal Charles's thunder, she wore black lace teamed with the spikiest, sexiest Blahniks

es and I think, well, maybe ... after all. But my fantasies don't really have a body. I find men's body's repulsive." Do you find your own body repulsive? "Yes. I sink I do." But you're so wonderfully handsome! "No, no, no, no - please, no." He is a great aesthete. He likes things to be exquisite, beautiful, as perfect as possible. Sex is rarely so. Bodies are rarely so. A shoe can sometimes get there, though. Everything he has he pours into his shoes. They may even be his sex life. Certainly, women say they feel very sexy in them. "They are strappy and sexy as hell. The shoe itself looks like a woman," Sandra Bernhard has said. This, I suppose, is what makes a Blahnik a Blahnik, and not just an over-priced, tissue-thin fad.

A Blahnik shoe isn't just a fashion accessory. It's a fashion phenomenon in its own right. There are pairs in the V&A and

pairs in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. It is the choice on the catwalk. Patsy Kensit wore a rose-covered pair on her wedding day. The night Prince Charles's interview with Jonathan Dimbleby was broadcast, and Diana wanted to steal his thunder, she attended a dinner in off-the-shoulder black lace teamed with the spikiest, sexiest Blahniks. Paloma Picasso says: "I am never without my Blahniks, even in my dreams." Bianca Jagger says: "Manolo is not a shoemaker. He is a great artist." I say: "Can we go back now and try on some more? I think the problem might have been my thick socks. Would there be a 70-year-old pop sock out back I could borrow?" Saxe always seem to have one.

Manolo was born in the Canary Islands. His mother, Emmanuela, was Spanish while his father, Stefan, was Czech. Manolo and his younger sister, Evangeline, who now works with him in London, were brought up on the family's banana plantation. Their father was very strict in an Austro-Hungarian way. You had to be bathed and ready for dinner at 8pm precisely. It was starched shirt and tie for church on Sunday. Bedtimes were strictly adhered to. Manolo loved his father, but they were never close, no. He was always much closer to his mother. Emmanuela loved glamour and beauty. She read *American Vogue* and *Italian Elle*. Manolo soaked them up after her. She loved Hollywood movies. Manolo always accompanied her to the one cinema in town. She bought rich silks and had the local shoemaker make up shoes especially for her. "I remember this red silk pair. Oh, so wonderful." He was an aesthete even then. Things that weren't beautiful got short shrift, and would continue to do so. He lost his virginity at 20 to an older woman. It effectively put him off for life. "How do I say this? It was disappointing. It not live up to my expectations. Maybe I had seen too many Hollywood movies." Of course, sex the first time is never very pretty for anyone, but we persist. Manolo didn't bother.

Manolo has to have everything just-so. Manolo has three baths a day and is

furiously tidy and sleeps between 100 per cent linen sheets. "I get them from the same place the Pope gets his." Manolo must protect himself from ugliness at all times. (It's terrific he is being so nice to me.) Inspired by his mother, no doubt, he started making shoes as a very young boy. He would capture lizards, then make miniature booties for them out of sweet wrappers. "I like the best foil from the chocolate bar with the rice crispies in it." Nestlé Crunch? "Yes, I sink so. Beautiful quality foil." Did the lizards like his shoes. "Yes! And they look so sweet." Could they walk in them. "I didn't do the heels then." He has always had a thing about feet, too. "When I was 10, my mother take me to the Louvre, and I go round and kiss all the beautiful feet

He started making shoes as a young boy. He would make miniature booties for lizards out of sweet wrappers

on the beautiful statues." A good foot is a clean one, he says. He does his own on a Sunday, in his afternoon bath. "I scrub, scrub, scrub, then do the nails." The nicest feet he's ever seen? "Raquel Welch has amazing, beautiful, clean tidy feet. Madonna also has a very groomed, pretty foot-sie." Have you ever encountered smelly feet? "If I did, I would faint!"

He was a bright boy. He read a lot as a child - adored Blyton and Dickens - and still reads a lot. He suffers horribly from insomnia and sleeps only two or three hours a night, so reads between his linen sheets. We have a good talk about books. He liked Martin Amis until recently. "I like London Fields very much but after that ... no." He gives me the names of some Latin American authors I should try. He has a good mind but, no, doesn't hate the air-kissing

world of fashion. It is fun, he says, plus he never has to do a great deal of it. When he's in the shop, yes, but aside from that, no. He has a house in Bath, a flat in London and travels endlessly. Where is he happiest? In his factories in Italy, he says, sitting on the benches with the workers, hand-sewing or stretching leather, doing what he does best. Is he ever lonely. "No. Never. I am happiest man alive!"

He studied languages at Geneva University and worked for a while as a UN translator but hated it. He thought he might become a theatrical set designer. He sketched some sets for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which, during a holiday in New York he managed to show to Diana Vreeland, the then editor of *American Vogue*. She said Manolo, your sets are okay, but the little shoes on the figures, they are divine. And that was that. "After that, I come to London, and I buy some cork from Camden market and I put on top some extraordinary patent leather in electric blue, electric green and disgusting pink, and Molly Parkin, she buy them from me." Molly Parkin was featured in the *Sunday Times* wearing them. After that, *Vogue* called. And where *Vogue* calls, everyone else follows. His first mega-famous client? "Bianca Jagger. Oh, so exotic. Like a little bird. She is rather serious now, no?"

Back to the shop where, yes, I get to play shoes again. Baby-pink suede ones. Even iguana ones. But the daintier and strappier the shoe, the more my ankles look like lassoed salamis. Manolo says I can choose a pair to take home. "Pleeeeee, take whatever you like," he offers. Amazingly, I decline. But he's been so charming, it would seem rude and grubby somehow. We air-kiss our goodbyes. He doesn't try to flog me any Scotchguard. Not Saxe, like I said.

When I got back to the office and told Tamsin Blanchard, *The Independent's* fashion editor that I declined a free pair of Blahniks, this is what she said: "Are you mad? So what that you couldn't walk in them? You could have given them to me. You are monstrously selfish and I hate you."



Manolo Blahnik: An aesthete from childhood, he has devoted his life to the pursuit of all that is lovely

Photograph: Glyn Griffiths

'I may have bonded with Dennis, but I draw the line at breastfeeding him'



DINAH
HALL

I've never had a great deal of sympathy for bereaved pet owners who need counselling when Fido has shuffled off his mortal lead. But then I never realised how Dennis, he of the unfeasibly large testicles and hairless pink tail, had gnawed his way to my affections until I found myself in the vet's consulting room, tears streaming down my face, being told that the prognosis for a dehydrated rat with upper respiratory infection was not good. This was particularly embarrassing as my four chil-

dren were standing there dry-eyed, the 11-year-old keenly nuzzling at my sleeve asking if he could make the funeral arrangements. (They've never forgotten the splendid send off for Oscar, my parents' one-eyed dog, had - he was buried to the strains of Neil Young's *Old King* ("I had a dog, and his name was King.") Very moving it was too.)

Dennis's only hope - and it was a very slim one - said the pretty young vet, gently kissing him on the head, thus instigating a fresh eruption of tears

from me, was constant nursing over the weekend. Too weak to feed himself, he has had to be hand-fed Milupa baby food and hydrating solution by syringe - an exercise in nurturing which has, for the moment, staved off the demands by some of the children for a new baby brother. But I have had to put a dampener on their enthusiasm for alternative treatments - I may have bonded with Dennis but I draw the line at breastfeeding him.

By Saturday night, when the younger ones had finally got

their heads around the idea of a prognosis not being a cause for celebration (they had thought it meant Dennis was having babies) they had more than made up for unspilt tears at the vet's surgery. *Casualty* was sheer light entertainment compared to the harrowing scenes at home. So it was a relief to escape to a friend's 50th birthday party, where a nice psychologist told us that Dennis's death would, in the long run, only be beneficial to the children's development.

Pets are good for children,

but dead pets are even better, apparently. It would, he said, prepare for our deaths. He's right, I'm sure - in fact I can see it now: I will only have to take to my bed with a slight sniffle, and the children will be there forcing open my mouth and squirting foul-smelling Milupa vegetable broth down my throat.

But certainly there have been some benefits from this *weekendus horribilis* - it has taken the 11-year-old's mind off the Third World War. His somewhat precipitate request

for a nice burial plot for Dennis is a lot easier to oblige than the demand that his father build an Anderson shelter in the garden. And it has made the girls forget about my haircut. Having taken to heart Age Concern's message about old people becoming invisible but not having the wherewithal inside my bra to draw attention to myself in any other way, I have had a radical 1950s schoolboy crop.

I don't know whether Dennis had this problem, but as soon as my five-year-old saw me, she

burst into hysterical sobs and told me I looked "horrible" - just the sort of confidence booster you need when you've had your tumbling locks shorn. The hairdresser told me a short cut would make me look younger (not that I care, oh, goodness me, no) but the children soon put paid to that, pointing out that the "hundreds" of grey hairs that the hairdresser had somehow excavated made me look like an old granny, and please could I not come in to school until I had had them dyed. Horrible little ageists.

Wise old bird who deserves the chance to spread his wings further



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It is a pity that Tony Blair's promise to clean up politics has been so tarnished by the affair of the £1m donation from the king of Formula One motor racing. As it is, the Prime Minister's declaration of war against corruption in local government in Scarborough yesterday is bound to be viewed through eyes slightly narrowed with cynicism.

All the stuff about the fast and furious rooting out of wrongdoing smacked a little too much of posturing for the sake of today's headlines, from a party leader who senses his grip on the moral high ground of politics is slipping.

That does not mean Mr Blair's stern warning to local councillors is unwelcome, but perhaps the Prime Minister ought to take more credit for having already done the one thing that really matters in restoring people's confidence in the ethical standards of British politics: he has appointed Patrick Neill as enforcer of the crusade to clean up party funding.

Lord Neill is a wise old bird, as might be expected of someone who was not merely a fellow of All Souls but warden of the place. But there is no ivory-spire unworshipfulness about him. Even as he was doing Lord Nolan's shining armour, he stopped the Labour Party's attempt to slip a trick past him. Over the weekend before he took up his post as Chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, he was asked in a letter, which had been approved by the Prime Minister, whether Labour was right to refuse further donations from Mr Ecclestone. Sir Patrick, as he then was, saw through the ploy at once, and ordered the party to hand back the donation it had already received - little knowing (because the party had not told him) that it would turn out to be as much as £1m.

Since then, he has continued to demonstrate such spirited independence that all but the most partisan citizens should now be cheering him on loudly. With a matter-of-fact radicalism, he declared

that his remit would include the link between party donations and honours. Lords Putnam, Paul and Hamlyn, on whose offshore trusts we report today, should look out for their red-leather-upholstered seats. Mr Blair's innocence may be genuine when he protests that they were ennobled purely on the basis of their kindness to small furry animals (or whatever). But he needs a strong outside authority to insist that, because they have given money to the party, there should be a presumption against making them life peers. It really does not matter that the Conservative record on "cash for honours" was far, far worse.

Last night, Lord Neill bulldozed the convention of "not pre-empting the committee's deliberations" to tell the BBC precisely what else he has in mind. It is a very good list: all donations over £1,000 to be declared; a limit on national election spending; a ban on blind trusts; and an electoral commissioner to police this re-

volutionary new regime. To which the only proposal which really needs to be added is that all donations should be declared immediately on receipt.

Now, if all that lot could hit the statute books by the time of the next election, Labour would have delivered - almost despite itself - on its promise of a "new politics". What is so refreshing about it is that it truly embodies the spirit in which Mr Blair and his party attacked the Tories before the election, while dismissing ruthlessly Labour's weasel excuses for failing to live up to that spirit since May last year.

Mr Blair, to take another example, thought a blind trust to fund his private office was a good idea. The principle sounds worthy, because if he did not know who was paying he could not be influenced. But blind trusts fail the test of the "general principle of openness" which Lord Neill set out yesterday.

That general principle takes him further than Labour's position in other re-

spects. Labour should be praised for voluntarily and unilaterally publishing the names of its donors who pay more than £5,000 in a year, but that does not mean that the rules to be enforced against all parties should be even tighter. While party membership and small donations should clearly remain private, £5,000 is to the vast majority of British voters a very big "bung", and cutting the threshold to £1,000 would ensure that there is no appearance of undue influence.

Lord Neill was right, too, to dismiss the argument that people will try to find ways around a national cap on election campaign spending. "Whatever you put in place, there will be some clever chap thinking of a way round it," he said. But it is essential for the sake both of the quality and the fairness of our democracy that there should be a level playing field. What is needed is a powerful electoral commissioner to enforce the rules. Lord Neill has already proved that he is the ideal person for the job.

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Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

LETTERS

Urban poverty

Your article "Brown swoops to save doomed estates" (6 February) would have been better entitled "Brown charges up same old blind alley". Government policy on urban poverty has followed this mistaken path of area targeting for the last 30 years, and it has failed.

The reasons are, first, that poverty and deprivation are not particularly concentrated. Yes, there are some places much worse than others, but any policy to target the areas most affected will always miss most of the target group. Most poor people do not live in the small number of "worst" target areas.

Second, these are human problems, not problems of place. People move around. One estate or area may improve, but only at the cost of the deprivation, and often the same deprived people, moving somewhere else - unless there is action to reduce the net amount of poverty and deprivation.

The previous government commissioned, and then ignored, a review of urban policy led by Professor Robson at Manchester University. It showed that 30 years of area-targeted initiatives have failed to improve the areas concerned relative to the country as a whole. The report commented that targeting people rather than areas might be more appropriate.

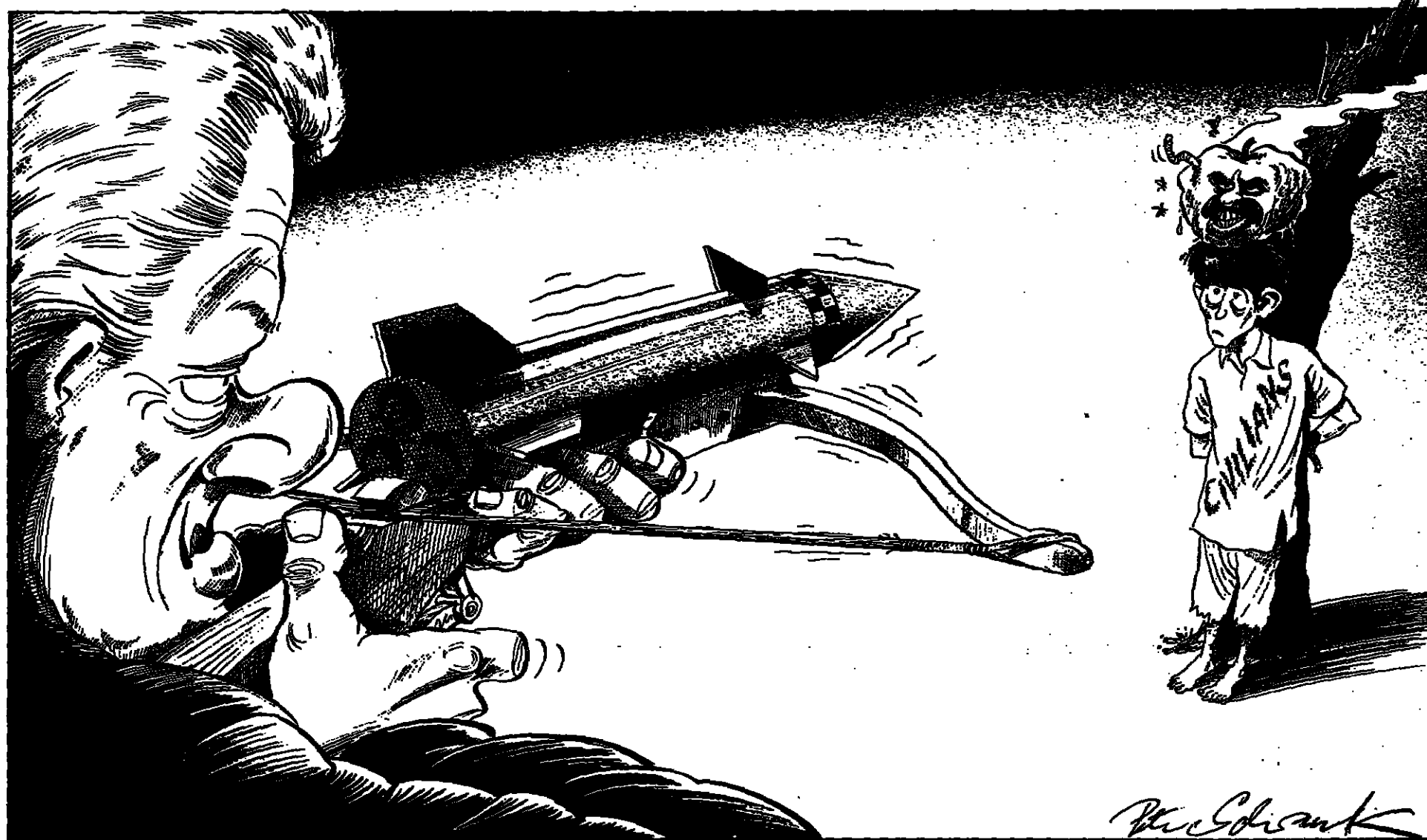
I well remember working on economic development in Peckham when the then government announced a task force to "swoop" on the area with £2m to spend. Local views were divided between those who thought that the money would not go far when divided equally between local people, and those who said that it was just not enough to knock the place down. People in deprived areas are deeply cynical of these government initiatives, since they know that what is really necessary to tackle poverty is a matter of action on low wages, high unemployment, low benefits, and a regressive tax system.

If Mr Brown wants to tackle poverty, then he should stay in the Treasury working on the tax system, and stop swooping on estates, which will only alarm the residents.

ALAN TAYLOR
London SE24

Diplomacy and Iraq

Whatever pretensions to diplomacy and sense European maturity offers, it was America that resolved the awesome mess in



1918; Britain and America who rescued Europe from a maniacal Hitler; and it is the English-speaking community once more showing the resolute appreciation of the weakness of diplomatic nicety in dealing with a ruthless dictator ("US and Britain insist on force against Iraq", 7 February).

The astonishing self-interest and biased, unreasoning diplomacy of the pro-Romanian French at Versailles and Trianon set up the Second World War and produced the fractious nation states of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia that failed the test of time and ethnic sense. The Americans walked out of those negotiations in disgust. Would that they had stayed.

Giscard d'Estaing and Charles de Gaulle thought the French could go it alone in foreign and defence policy. Now they suppose, again patently for self-interest, that they can bring Saddam Hussein to sweet reason and compliance just by words. And after seventy years of monolithic, Stalinist, self-interested diplomacy, Russia professes international media-

tion prowess, but places naive faith in another brutal despot's benevolence towards mankind.

History teaches there is no answer to such people short of superior, collective strength. Dictators do not understand reason, and diplomacy is nothing, if reason be not a tool.

MERVYN BENFORD
Banbury,
Oxfordshire

Whilst it may be the case that Saddam Hussein is a despot and is manufacturing nuclear and chemical weapons - is this a problem as far as the United Kingdom is concerned? We are not a primary, secondary or even a tertiary target in his game plan. As a nation, we no longer have the wherewithal to police the world. There are far more important global and home issues to address.

IAN TYSZKIEWICZ
Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire

Arts funding

I'm grateful to Matthew Francis (letter, 2 February) for confirming that neither my wife nor

I have, as claimed by Trevor Phillips (Comment, 24 January), disappeared. It's been a worrying week.

Together with thousands of other Greenwich Theatre supporters, we're still here, and for the best of reasons. The Greenwich is the one place left, not just in south-east London, but in the whole of south-east England, where we can see original productions of a high standard at affordable prices.

Trevor Phillips naturally defended the decision of the London Arts Board to withdraw its grant. Equally naturally, Matthew Francis replied robustly. But among all the recriminations, are we perhaps missing the point? Britain has the best theatre in the world - and we don't deserve it. Attend productions at the RSC, the National, or any of the major West End theatres and listen to the voices around you in the interval. It's clear that if the Americans stopped coming, even the most revered theatre companies would be in deep trouble. Surely the regional arts boards and theatre management should be

working together to encourage more Britons to support one of the few areas in which we still lead the world?

Closing theatres like the Greenwich won't help, because they are the very places where people can afford to discover the magic of live theatre, and develop the theatre-going habit. And they provide the only opportunities for new actors and directors to develop their craft.

In less than two years, Greenwich will be the centre of world-wide interest. Among the discoveries that visitors from home and overseas could have made is the superb quality of theatre that exists outside Stratford-upon-Avon and the West End. What a pity they won't have the chance.

LEONARD WOODING
Gravesend, Kent

Benefits of fluoride

Maureen Maddock (letter, 7 February) summarises a miscellany of "scientific" studies on fluoride taken from world-wide sources. Many of these are thirty years old, small-scale,

incapable of repetition, without benefit of peer review and, most importantly, relate to varying levels of fluoridation.

Early US projects were at 5 parts per million. In areas of India, fluoride occurs naturally at 14 parts per million and causes widespread physical damage, especially where malnutrition exists. But in the UK, fluoride addition is rigorously monitored to top up naturally occurring fluoride to one part per million. Its benefits over the last 25 years have been very clear.

JEM MURRELL
West Wickham, Kent

BBC drama

Further to your article (6 February) concerning Michael Wearing and the BBC's drama series output, may I set the record straight about the decision-making process on the Janet Neel adaptations? The decision not to proceed was entirely an editorial judgement made by the Controller of BBC1, Peter Salmon, in the context of the very strong range of drama titles on offer to him.

No focus-group research was undertaken to consider the project. In fact, focus-group research is never used in BBC Television as a deciding factor in any commissioning decision.

ALAN YENTOB
BBC Director of Television
London W12

Short measures

In reply to James Hannaway, who says that those who drink two pints before driving are just as safe as they are when tired or otherwise not at their best (letter, 4 February): being tired or having a cold is part of the human condition which we cannot avoid; we can choose not to drink and drive.

Although we feel a little more confident after a drink, research on highly skilled bus drivers has shown that their judgement was affected long before their skills deteriorated. After a very small amount of alcohol, they were sure they could drive an 8ft bus between posts 7ft 9in apart.

JOHN A ROSE
Giggleswick, North Yorkshire

Pooh in the dome?

As Pooh's biographer, I am naturally interested in Gwyeth Dunwoody's plea for his return to England (report, 6 February).

Your reports says he is "languishing" in New York. I have seen him several times and he looks remarkably comfortable, though Kanga has problems with her throat and Tigger has lost the bounce he has in *The House At Pooh Corner*.

As Christopher Milne once said, the toys "even in their prime were no more than a first rough sketch, the merest hint of what they were to become". Pooh, in E.H. Shepherd's first drawings, was based not on this bear, but on his own son's Growler.

Rosa Prince is wrong to say that Pooh has not seen England in the last fifty years. He did fly over (by Concorde) for an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Perhaps Mayor Giuliani would consider letting us have the toys on loan for the millennium exhibition?

ANN THWAITES
Low Thurston,
Norfolk

Silkin's 'Stand'

Michael Glover's graphic summary of the celebration of the late lamented poet Jon Silkin ("Memories of a poet's passion", 4 February) was invaded by a gremlin. When Jon sold copies of his magazine *Stand* at cinema queues, among many other places, it was a "sacred" and not a "secret" blue invoice-book he invariably had with him, for sale or return consignments and the like.

It was this sturdy businesslike resourcefulness, uncommon among little mag editor-publishers, which underlay the extraordinary solvency of *Stand* to which the article paid due respects.

MICHAEL HOROVITZ
London W11

Disposable PM

May I point out the single most obvious flaw in Peter Mann's republican diatribe (letter, 5 February)?

If we had been a republic at the beginning of the Second World War we would have been stuck with President Chamberlain - and lost! The true value of constitutional monarchy is that it makes bad political leaders instantly disposable.

JOHN DAVIS
Bookham, Surrey

The greatest story ever told: an immaculate entertainment concept from Disney



MILES
KINGTON

It was only a matter of time before Disney decided to go for the ultimate and make an animated film based on the life of Jesus. This brave decision has been made partly because it makes sense from a millennium marketing point of view, partly because there aren't many Old World classics left that they haven't already dealt with.

To allay fears about the Disney treatment of a Bible story, Disney executives have been giving interviews to selected members of the press, and I was lucky enough to have five minutes with Ralph J. Kleinmut, who is Chief Disney Jesus Story Co-ordinator, Europe.

Here they are. (The five minutes.) Me: Doesn't it seem a strange idea to retell the Bible story, when it has already been quite well told? Disney: Has it? By whom? Me: In the Bible. Disney: Oh, right! Well, in a

sense, that helps our case, because there are at least four versions of the Jesus story in the Bible, done by Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. So doing different versions is not a new idea.

Me: So this will be the gospel according to Disney? Disney: Right! Don't forget that many other people have retold the story, too. Norman Mailer, most recently, and your very own Lloyd Webber and Rice. Me: They are not my very own. Disney: Well, they're somebody's. Maybe ours. Yes, I think Rice is ours. Me: In all modern Disney films, the hero has been impossibly chunky, with vacant Hollywood beefcake looks. Will this apply to Jesus too? Disney: We are still auditioning for the part of Jesus. Me: You have to audition for an animated part? Disney: For the voice, yes.

Me: But how will you draw him? And

will there be a love interest? And will there be a happy ending...? After all, you totally changed the end of the *Hunchback of Notre Dame*...

Disney: Wait, wait! Steady on. We're still formulating the beginning of the film. We've established Jesus as a baby in the manger... Me: Gurgling and chuckling, like Mowgli in *The Jungle Book*? Already doing miracles in the crib? With the animals making goo-goo eyes over the edge of the cot? And the baby donkeys and oxen playing games, tossing the gold, myrrh and frankincense back and forth? And a few birds singing gospel songs in black voices? Disney: Why, yes! How did you know?

Me: I have seen Disney films before, you know. How are you visualising the twelve disciples? Disney: As of right now, we are envisaging only seven disciples. They will

be called Happy, Sainly, Holy, Moly, Goody, Godly, and Doubtful. Me: Doubtful? Disney: Yes. He is based loosely on Doubting Thomas, and he will be the cute, comic one. Me: How do you have a cute, comic disciple? Disney: Because whenever he prays he gets the wrong answer to his prayers.

Me: Hmm. Will the disciples be dwarves? Disney: No. That would not be dignified. But Pontius Pilate will probably be a dwarf. Me: Why? Disney: So that people do not feel sorry for him when he gets zapped. Me: Pardon? Disney: We have been rethinking the end to the New Testament story. Me: Hold on. Do you mean that Jesus doesn't get crucified? Disney: Disney: Jesus has never been pro-violence. We are very sensitive to any accusations that children might be corrupted by on-screen violence.

Me: Do you mean that Jesus doesn't get crucified? Disney: The whole message of the New Testament is that Jesus is alive at the end. He doesn't die in the long run. The important thing is to affirm that Jesus is living.

Me: Do you mean that Jesus doesn't get crucified? Disney: Well, we don't say that he isn't crucified. But it all takes place a little off-screen. The point we are emphasising is that Pontius Pilate will get his come-uppance. That's what people are going to cheer for. Me: When he gets zapped? Disney: By a thunder-bolt. Pow! Me: And he dies? Disney: No. He gets changed into a fish. Me: A fish? Disney: And gets chased by the shark. Me: What shark? Disney: The shark that helps Jesus walk on the water. Me: But what...? Aide: I'm sorry. Five minutes is up.

Sex, lies and conning the man with the hamster



THOMAS
SUTCLIFFE
ON NOT TELLING
THE TRUTH

A friend of mine hit a moral pothole the other day. Having promised to buy her children a hamster she arrived at the pet shop just before closing time to find the owner adamant about the animal's release date. He had resolved, for reasons to do with hamster psychiatric health, not to sell any of the animals until they had reached a certain age, presumably the point at which they would be mature enough to survive being strapped to a kite or forcibly dressed in an Action Man Navy Seal wet-suit.

The cut-off date was the following morning - a mere fifteen hours away. The children's faces fell, at which point my friend declared that she had to work the next day and wouldn't it be possible to bend the rules just a little. This was not true, but it had the desired effect - the hamster was handed over to its new life of tormenting affection.

Unfortunately the thrill of new livestock was eclipsed by the far greater excitement of Mummy's Lie - a scandalising contradiction to the nanny's Kantian injunctions against all species of falsehood. There followed an awkward philosophical debate about the difference between lies which hurt people and lies which don't.

Learning how and when to lie is part of all children's education - even if the tuition is rarely quite as explicit as that. Indeed, you could say that the ability to discriminate between gradations of lie, to make the rather difficult judgement about when a lie ceases to be justifiable, is one marker of achieved adulthood. This is not quite as cynical as it sounds: a recent Hollywood movie, *Liar Liar*, explored the impossibility of life without social prevarication of any kind.

In the storyline, a skydiver lawyer is subjected to one of those useful Hollywood enchantments and becomes incapable of even the smallest deviation from the truth. The result is a catastrophic candour, in which social performance and private instincts collide. He tells people exactly what he is thinking and, as a result, his world collapses.

The film wasn't in favour of lying, of course - it was in favour of the lead character changing his inner life in such a way that truth was no longer a liability to him (Kant would have enjoyed this movie, I think). But the comedy only worked because the audience could recognise the farcical horror of being deprived of the lie as a daily utility, a way of smoothing awkward corners off the world.

To say that all politicians are liars, then, is not to join in the callow dismissal of the

entire profession (though that is how such a phrase would usually be deployed). It is simply to make the redundant point that all politicians are people, even if they are people with a particularly sharp need for the ability to leave things unsaid. The most meticulously truthful politician is likely, at one time or another, to have left a false impression undisturbed.

The moral question, then, is not whether politicians lie (the answer to that being that they probably lie a bit less than the rest of us - because they are scrutinised so closely) but what kinds of lie they tell, and to what ends those lies are bent. And those questions are surely at work in the current scandal over President Clinton's peculiar method of relieving the cares of office.

If, like many people, you believe that the President is lying when he says there was no sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky there are two possible ways of judging his behaviour (his behaviour in lying, that is, which is distinct from the behaviour which - allegedly - made the lie necessary). Either he is cheerfully amoral and his conscience didn't even show up for a wrestling bout, or he has assessed the lie in such a way that it outweighs the truth.

It isn't difficult to imagine how such a justification might evolve - "I am a popular and successful President while my enemies are corrupt in their strategies and sinister in their purposes. Impeachment or resignation would gravely damage public confidence in the democratic processes. I will not jeopardise the future of my country simply because I feel squeamish about a departing from the truth, particularly when the matter concerned has no bearing on my abilities as a leader. Indeed, now I come to think of it, it is nothing less than my patriotic duty to deny everything. I know it looks a bit grubby, but wipe away all that dirt they've been throwing, and you'll find it's a white lie really."

Unfortunately, one lie is never enough, and other consciences may not prove as easy to armlock into submission. The sight of the President's secretary, emerging into a harrangue of journalists with a look of bewildered terror, suggested that she had managed to preserve her innocence in office to a quite amazing degree. So it proved, if the *New York Times* is to be believed, and her decent anguish at being forced to choose between disloyalty and dishonesty should at least make Mr Clinton check his moral calculations again.

White lies do not generally put other people on the rack. Unfortunately too, for the President in this case, the media take a childlike attitude to lying rather than an adult one. The implicit assumption in many reports is that if the President is proved to have lied he will have to go.

But what is intriguing about the unfolding scandal is the evidence that the American public no longer accept such simplistic demarcations. Polls appear to show that even many of those who believe he has lied about Monica Lewinsky continue to support him. That will be taken in some quarters as proof of falling standards of public decency, but I'm not so sure.

While politicians and journalists like to pretend that all lies are equally black, (and even President Clinton implicitly accepts the rules in the manner of his responses) the public are grown-up enough to know that they come in infinite shades of grey.

If his brass neck holds, the President may yet make a getaway under cover of that moral haze.

Today's the day for peers to come to the aid of the little fish



Mr Big: Rupert Murdoch's tactics have squeezed smaller titles. A defeat in the Lords would be a defeat for him too

Photograph: Reuters



LORD
DESAI
ON PREDATORY
PRICING

The House of Lords comes alive whenever the Government has a large majority in the House of Commons. It's a time when little rebellions in the Upper House have to be dealt with by the powers that be. In the ultimate analysis, the Commons will have their way, and so they should. But the Lords can pinpoint where the Government's argument lacks logic or compassion. This afternoon is such an occasion.

The ostensible aim of the Competition Bill - now at Committee stage in the Lords - is to bring United Kingdom law on competition in line with European Law. It is also designed to make the British economy more competitive. This, second, objective is more

difficult. It is not at all clear what one has to do to make an industry or economy more competitive. Economists are forever debating the notion of competition. As years go by the techniques we deploy get better. We now have game theory while a previous generation got by with diagrams. Yet competition remains elusive.

It could mean a world in which roughly equal companies slug it out to share the market for their product. Each might try to make its product different from the rivals'. Companies might even vary their prices slightly. Such competition will improve the quality of products and help the consumers. It could drive the price down by making companies more efficient. A large pool of players competing with each other ensures diversity while benefiting the consumers by keeping prices low and quality high.

But there is another, darker definition of competition. As the famous American Robber Baron once said, what I mean by competition is rubbing my rivals out. Dog eat dog, or as the ancient Hindu philosophers put it, it's *Maya* - the Justice of the Fish. The big fish bite at the little ones, they use aggressive tactics to undercut and undermine. Companies which have resources to last out a long battle can engage in price wars. Their rivals either have to follow suit and match any cuts

in price cut or suffer a loss of market share and go under. After a while, the company with more resources wins the field by driving out the rivals.

If the first mode of competition is a healthy one, the second one is predatory. And it's predatory competition that is before the House of Lords this afternoon. Amendments to the Competition Bill are being moved by Liberal Democrat peer Lord [Tom] MacNally. The gist of them is that predatory pricing gets defined as uncompetitive behaviour.

It is a non-party move. The amendments are co-sponsored not only by Lord Astor, a former Tory Minister, but also Lord [Gordon] Borrie, who is a Labour peer and more than an expert on issues of fair trading and regulation. There will be support from the cross-benches as well.

It is a debate that is bound to generate a lot of heat. If the movers choose to divide the House, it is anybody's guess how the votes will go.

The Government will no doubt corral its support assiduously. But the Labour Party is in a minority in the Upper House. If the Liberal Democrats desert Labour and combine with Conservatives as well as picking up votes from the cross benches (always the most difficult to predict, and rightly so) there could be a defeat looming this afternoon.

Which would also be a defeat for Big Fish Rupert Murdoch and the aggressive price-cutting that he has used to promote sales of *The Times*.

But how can one prove that there is price cutting? Here there is a great divide between the philosophies of competition on the two sides of the Atlantic. In Britain we have had *laissez-faire*; we have been traditionally tolerant of monopolies as well as cartels. We have left well enough alone. Until recently that is.

In the United States they not only believe in the market, but they are also prepared to enforce competition. The Justice Department takes an active role in seeing to it that non-competitive behaviour is punished. The state intervenes to make the market work better.

This is why Microsoft is having to battle in the courts. Think back to the case of Freddie Laker, the little fish airline entrepreneur who considered himself a victim of uncompetitive behaviour by his rivals. He nearly proved his point in the American courts by suing various banks involved in funding his rivals. But that was in the days of the Thatcher-Reagan friendship. It proved mighty strong - I have been reliably in-

formed that miraculously and suddenly the American heat was turned off. This was a rare case of high-level Executive intervention in such matters.

What we need in Britain is a new culture backing the pursuit of non-competitive behaviour, not one in which there is high level intervention to protect predators.

Over to my fellow peers. If the House of Lords were to pass the anti-predatory pricing amendments, the focus would shift to the House of Commons. Ah, it will be said, the amendments passed only thanks to the hereditary peers. Over to the Cabinet. The Labour Party clearly has the power to squash the MacNally amendment if passed. It's vital, however, no one gets distracted by questions about the relationship of Lords and Commons and the powers of the Second Chamber. What matters is the nexus between money and politics.

Should the British political system be bent to suit the predatory behaviour of powerful press barons or should it arm itself with American-style vigilance to ensure fair competition? The writer is a Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics and a Labour peer.

Thank God he never got near Downing Street



DAVID
WALKER
ON ENOCH
POWELL

Younger readers start here. Enoch Powell, who died yesterday, was a marginal Tory politician. He was often slightly deranged, and looked it. His political life was a tissue of contradictions which a glib and right-leaning political press exalted as one of high principle. It's considered indelicate, even in our coolly secular age, to bad-mouth the dead. But Powell, in death as in life, seems to inspire a peculiar brand of flatterer praise so it's important to do two things - to freeze the contradictions and to trace Powell's political spoor. It turns out the inconsistencies are many and of his enduring influence there is very little trace indeed.

Item. Here was someone who claimed to know a thing or

two about ancient Rome, who could doubtless quote verbatim from Cicero's many speeches about senators on the take, who refused to list his commercial interests in the House of Commons Register on the grounds all parliamentarians are *ipso facto* "honourable".

Item. Here was an imperialist, that's to say a passionate believer in the British Empire who sat on his hands while, in the Fifties, the Tories begged West Indians to come to do menial jobs on the London buses who suddenly discovers that imperial sons and daughters are aliens who deserved to perish - he covered his tracks by pre-emptive citation of Virgil - in rivers of blood.

Item. Here was a principled opponent of public spending who resigned from Macmillan's Cabinet in 1957 when the old gent cooked the books who popped up as Minister of Health (in Macmillan's Cabinet) three years later to commence the mother of hospital building programmes, the basic fiscal position having changed not a jot in the intervening years.

Item. Here, memorably, was a life-long opponent of socialism, a Tory of deepest hue who urged his followers in 1974 to vote for ... the Labour Party, then entering one of its more obviously socialist phases.

So, when we see in today's obits those pearly adjectives and about Powell's principle and brilliance, we need to under-

stand this to be less about Powell than the perennial intellectual frustration of the right-wing in Britain. Gimlet-eyed, Powell gave the impression of high theory and intellectual rigour: the right flatters him to deceive themselves.

Conservatism is inherently an empirical creed which, to its credit, finds ideas, especially Big Ideas, repellent. Powell indeed was no systematic thinker (his great hero, Edmund Burke, not especially consistent in his conservatism, at least wrote

Powell evidently did not eat a balti in his life. On immigration he got the numbers and the sociology wrong

whole books). Powell's political testimony is, at best, a ragbag of occasional speeches.

As for his influence on practical politics, he was associated with two questions. One, let's call a spade a spade, was the racialism of large numbers of British people. They had been happy to have the Empire but, hypocritical, were none too happy when the *Empire Windrush* docked at Gravesend in 1947 with the first contingent of West Indian settlers. Powell, a passionate opponent of independence for India, offered no analysis of what the United Kingdom was to do in the changed circumstances of the

post-war world, no practical advice on the difficulties of integrating (comparatively small) numbers of African Caribbean, Indian and Pakistani people into urban life.

His, instead, was the sooth-sayer's part. Let others worry about repatriation (was that his preferred final solution?) or government planning for social integration. He preferred to condemn, though - apart from one memorable and unproven assertion about a poor white Wolverhampton widow having excrement thrust through her

letterbox by black people - chose to conceal his intent behind euphemism and Latin quotation.

Three decades on, Powell the prophet stands naked. He got the numbers and the sociology wrong. The race-fingering in Britain and Twentieth in the early Eighties sprang from conditions Powell never addressed. As for the positive cultural impact of non-white immigration, Powell evidently did not eat a balti in his life. As for his impact on Toryism: William Hague's visit to the Notting Hill carnival, however ridiculous he looked, said it all. Britain is a society in which

more or less happily black and white live together. There is no alternative.

The other Powell cause was a brand of conservatism with which Thatcherism made such a dramatic break. He was a Tory of the stop-the-world-I-want-to-get-off variety. Market capitalism, Powell was against it. European unity, against that too. The United States of America, bad news there. Negotiation to secure a peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland - Powell's love affair with Thatcher ended in the mid-eighties when she got all-Irish talks going.

In this kind of conservatism you never appear to need to say what you stand for. Did Powell want to restore the *status quo* in Ireland ante 1922, ante 1916 or ante 1798? Instead of the European Economic Community as was, he could hardly have proposed a free trade area since on the subject of free trade he was distinctly ambiguous. He was a British nationalist, yes, but (at least on the last occasion I interviewed him) admitted the Scots had every right to vote for independence.

Political views are one thing. Powell's deepest failure - since he was a practising politician, an MP since the early Fifties - was never to strive to build a working political entity to carry his views. Unlike Jean-Marie Le Pen, or before him Pierre Poujade, he created no reactionary front; when the dockers marched from the Pool of Lon-

don in his honour, did he respond? No, the man who allegedly "dared to express all the fears that secretly gripped millions" was a political mute. Powell was never dangerous, though he might have been if he had done a Mosley in 1968.

Eventually Powell's departure from Tory ranks seemed to come as much from callow rivalry with his contemporary Ted Heath as from principle.

Politics in a pluralist, democratic envelope is necessarily about negotiation and compromise, of leg room, of responding to changing empirical reality. That is why, in the final analysis, Ted Heath will always be incomparably greater in stature than Powell. Not just because Heath won elections (for the Tory Party leadership, the 1970 general) but because Heath saw that conservatism is always a bargain between what is and what might be.

Powell, by contrast, was an absolutist. He liked to claim his intellectual descent from Friedrich Nietzsche (Nietzsche, himself, was forever ruing England's petty compromises, its continual slide away from grand principles.) Thanks in part to his camp romanticism, Powell always had a love affair with death: he once memorably said his greatest wish was that he had been killed in the Second World War. That kind of mind is dangerous in a democracy. The fact he never got nearer Number 10 than the Ministry of Health is a blessing of history.

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Enoch Powell

John Enoch Powell, politician and classical scholar: born Stechford, Birmingham 16 June 1912; Fellow, Trinity College, Cambridge 1934-38; Professor of Greek, University of Sydney 1937-39; MBE 1943; MP (Conservative) for Wolverhampton South-West 1950-74, MP (Ulster Unionist) for Down South 1974-83, for South Down 1983-87 (resigned 1985, re-elected 1984); Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Local Government 1955-57; Financial Secretary to the Treasury 1957-58; Minister of Health 1960-63; PC 1960; married 1952, Pamela Wilson (two daughters); died London 8 February 1998.

Enoch Powell was a protean figure, intellectually by far the most interesting of his political contemporaries, and a man with many lives. A fine classical scholar, he became a distinguished soldier. He was a politician of distinction who, if he never held the highest office, none the less had a palpable influence on great events. And he ended his life as a biblical scholar.

Powell's life can be broken into many compartments, either chronologically or by theme, but it is perhaps best viewed in two sections – before and after 20 April 1968. On that fateful Saturday Powell made a speech on immigration that transformed the face of British politics and made it impossible for him to hold ministerial office again. For a man of vaunting ambition Powell's dismissal from the Conservative Shadow Cabinet as a result of the speech was a hard blow, particularly as he had not intended to create the explosion he did. "I felt," he said, "like a man walking down a street who is hit on the head by a tile falling from a roof." However, "I saw it immediately that I would never hold office again; and I determined to make the best use I could of my circumstances."

Before the speech Powell was regarded as an intensely interesting, quirky, and independent figure in politics: after it he was a cynosure of the national eye, hated by many and loved by many, but never regarded with indifference.

It was an improbable happening in the adult career of a male child born to humble schoolteachers in 1912 in, as he liked to put it, "a house overlooking a railway cutting in Stechford, Birmingham", though he liked to add, with relish, "during a thunderstorm".

His mother, Ellen, gave up teaching when he was born, and devoted herself thenceforth to his education. "My childhood," Powell later wrote, "is very much my mother." Having taught herself classical Greek, she passed her knowledge on to her son. He attended a local dame school, and then won a scholarship to King Edward's in Birmingham. His relaxations were few: he exercised regularly in the school gymnasium because "it was desirable to keep fit" and he played the clarinet because "it was the only instrument common to both the brass band and the orchestra". His parents, however, united to persuade him not to pursue his early ambition of a career in music. Instead he won a scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge, and, in his first year, won all the main classical prizes open to undergraduates: this achievement was, and remains, unique.

What he did during his Cambridge years he did by means of intense self-denial. A former pupil of his school once asked him to tea. Powell replied "No". He dined in hall only when college regulations required him to. He refused an invitation to dinner with the Master because he was too busy. He kept it by walking each evening from Trinity to Cambridge railway station and back – a round trip of about an hour. During the Cambridge years, however, two enormous interests became part of his life, and influenced him thereafter.

The first was A.E. Housman. Housman was both the greatest classical scholar of the age, and a noted poet. Powell began to write poetry. He also, under the influence of Housman, began to write of the Greek classics in the most rigorous and, some would say, arid of manners. His *A Lexicon to Herodotus* 1938, the most complete guide to the meaning of all the words used by the great Greek historian, and translation of Thucydides (1942) were completed before he took his degree in 1933. He had, meanwhile, taught himself Welsh and translated an important medieval Welsh text.

The other powerful influence on Powell was the study of German.

At the time of his death, Powell was fluent in eight languages, but his first contemporary love was German, and his hero was Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche had become a professor at the age of 24. Powell determined to beat him. "To my intense chagrin, however, I did not make it until I was 25." The professional appointment was in Australia, at the University of Sydney.

By then, though, something else had happened. Powell had become convinced of the evil that was in Nazi Germany, and he told his rather startled Vice-Chancellor at Sydney that he would resign his chair once war with Germany began. The Vice-Chancellor, he recalled, thought him more than a trifle mad to envisage such a possibility. But on the occasion of the murder, in June 1939, of an Englishman, R.M. Tinkler, by Japanese soldiers in Tientsin, Powell wrote:

For a while his hand forgets
And bends the knee to threats
His vengeful spirit whets
The German bayonets.

On 4 September 1939 Powell resigned his chair and returned to Britain to enlist in his father's old regiment, the Royal Warwickshire, in whose churchyard he is to be buried, in his brigadier's uniform.

As he had been the youngest professor in the Commonwealth so Powell became the youngest brigadier in the Army. He served in intelligence, principally in North Africa, and always regretted that he never saw combat. The war over, he went to India and fell in love with the country. He learnt Hindi and Urdu – achieving the status of interpreter in both languages. Inflamed by the prospect of Indian independence, he resigned his commission, to enter politics at home. He wrote later:

I thought of how Burke had said 160 years earlier that the keys of India were not in Calcutta, not in Delhi, they were in that box – the Despatch Box at the House of Commons. I decided at that time that I must go there.

Powell first joined the Conservative Research Department. There he shared a room with Iain Macleod and Reginald Maundling and was in Macleod's words, "memorably unapproachable". Powell did, however, fall for his secretary, Pamela Wilson, the daughter of a colonel. (He loved later to recall, "I outranked my father-in-law.") Pamela turned down his first proposal on the grounds, "My father would never allow me to marry a teetotaler." Powell learnt about drink and, at his second attempt, Pamela accepted him.

Powell was elected to the House of Commons in 1951. Almost instantly he displayed his independence, turning down the offer of a post in the Welsh Office. Thereafter his rise was less than meteoric. His first governmental job was as Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Ministry of Housing; his second (in 1957) as Financial Secretary to the Treasury.

Nine months later Powell and the two other Treasury ministers – the others being Peter Thorneycroft and Nigel Birch – resigned because of their conviction that the Macmillan government was spending too much. Powell was thus first identified with a policy of thrift in the handling of the public purse which was to occupy much of his time for the rest of his life.

He refused Macmillan's offer of office until Thorneycroft was also restored. (Birch's health was indifferent, and he had ruled himself out of consideration.) In 1960 Powell became Minister of Health, and embarked on a massive hospital building programme. He also won notoriety for outflanking a pay claim by nurses. This was the first evidence the general public had of his flint-like capacity to defy received opinion.

Then, in 1963, he (along with Iain Macleod) provoked another storm. Macmillan decided to retire; his health was not good, and he had been demoralised by a series of scandals. (The most notable of these was the so-called Profumo affair, in which the then Secretary for War lied to the House of Commons about his relationship with a prostitute, Christine Keeler. Powell's acceptance of the Prime Minister's profession of ignorance on the matter was widely seen – because of his known moral probity – as decisive in saving the life of the Government.) Macmillan, however, organised the succession to himself. The palm fell to the Earl of Home. Macleod and Powell, both of whom favoured R.A. Butler, declined to serve in the new Prime Minister's Cabinet. A year later the Conservative Party narrowly lost a general election.



Powell: combination of the prophet and the pariah

Photograph: Hulton Getty

In 1965 Powell stood for the leadership of his party, on the first occasion on which Tory backbenchers could vote for their leader. He gained a derisory 15 votes and then – having been, briefly, Conservative transport spokesman – served under Edward Heath as Conservative defence spokesman. Then came 1968.

The Shadow Cabinet had decided to move an amendment to the Government's planned legislation on race relations. Having agreed its terms, Powell spoke in Birmingham on immigration. The speech – the best remembered phrase from which is "I seem to see the river Tiber foaming with much blood" – had an explosive effect. Heath, whose views on restricting New Commonwealth immigration did not markedly differ from Powell's, objected to the tone of their enunciation. On the night of the speech (and after some pressure from other colleagues), he dismissed Powell from the front bench. Powell was never again to serve in a senior political capacity.

However, the speech did make him a leading national figure. London dockworkers marched in his support. He received thousands of letters. None the less he rejected all appeals to stand for the leadership of his party and, in the general election of June 1970, contributed materially to Heath's victory. In what is, to my mind, the most memorable of his speeches he declared:

On Thursday your vote is about a Britain that, with all its faults and failings, is still free, and great because it is free. On Thursday your vote decides whether that freedom shall survive or not. You dare not entrust it to any government but a Conservative government.

More, however, was to come. Powell had always been a nationalist. After Heath's victory in 1970, and the subsequent entry of the United Kingdom into the EEC, Powell became ever more fervently British and ever more fervent in renouncing the recognition of sovereignty that membership of the Common Market involved. Throughout the parliament elected in 1970 he spoke out on a great many subjects, but on none more energetically than the EEC. As the Heath government floundered he asked, in the House, whether the Prime Minister had taken leave of his senses. (He did not know, at the time, that Edward Heath was quite seriously ill because of a thyroid deficiency.) When, in 1974, in the face of a mounting industrial crisis, Heath called a general election, Powell startled admirers and enemies alike by declining to stand as a Conservative candidate.

His announcement came in the form of a curt letter to the chairman of his constituency association. Towards the end of the campaign, however, he went further. He advised all who approved of his views – on immigration, the economy but, above all, on the EEC – to vote for the Labour Party. Heath lost the election, albeit by a narrow margin. He lost again in October, and was never to hold power again.

Puzzling though it was to many of his followers, Powell's reasoning for backing Labour was simple. Harold Wilson had promised a referendum on EEC membership. This offered a chance of escape from the tentacles of the Community, and Powell believed that the opportunity should be taken: he was never in doubt that Wilson wanted to stay in; but he believed that a referendum could be a way out. He was wrong: the referendum in 1975 kept Britain within the EEC.

Throughout 1974 Powell resisted many attempts to persuade him to return to Parliament as a Tory. When he did come back it was as an Ulster Unionist. His decision to accept a nomination to the Ulster constituency of South Down was, again, all of a piece with his character. He believed above all in the unity of the United Kingdom and was more than happy to serve out his final political years in preserving that unity. His final political victory was to obtain an increased number of Westminster seats for Northern Ireland, up from six to 13 seats. This he secured from the minority government headed by James Callaghan, who had succeeded Harold Wilson as Leader of the Labour Party.

One of the ironies – and there were many of them – of Powell's political career was that the increase in Ulster seats (the achievement of which he was most proud) involved a change of boundaries in County Down. As a consequence of that change he lost his seat in Parliament in the general election in 1974. He did not cease to be active as a commentator on politics. But, as he once put it, "The difference between 1974 and 1987 was this. After 1974 I thought it was likely that I would come back. After 1987 I knew I never would."

All suggestions of a life peerage were declined. After all, he said, "I opposed the introduction of these things. I could hardly accept one, could I?" Furthermore, in an unlikely alliance with Michael Foot, Powell had, under the second Wilson gov-

ernment, blocked any change in the make-up of the upper house. This was during the life of the second government headed by Harold Wilson: the unlikely pairing was devastatingly effective.

In the year before the general election of 1970, when I was the desk officer responsible for Home Office affairs at the Conservative Research Department, at least weekly – and sometimes, daily – there arrived from Powell an attack on one of my leaflets or pamphlets on the subject of immigration. I had strict instructions from my Director, Brendon Sewell, never to reply directly to Powell, but to leave that difficult task to him.

It was difficult not because of any major difference of opinion on the subject between Sewell and Powell, but because Powell so relished intellectual combat that his epistles resembled the work of a scholar of the Talmud. Having himself been a Research Department desk officer, Enoch Powell was particularly zealous in spotting any mistakes we made.

Suddenly, then, there was a change. One evening, after the weekly meeting of the Tory backbench Home Affairs Committee Powell called after me in the corridor. I turned back, expecting a diatribe. He had heard I was against Britain's joining the Common Market. Was this true? It was. He stood in thought for a moment, head bent, hand to chin, and then said, in that deliberate way which was so characteristic of him, "I suppose, then, that I'll have to leave you to get on with that." The letters and memos stopped straight away.

The greatest endeavour of Powell's later years was *The Evolution of the Gospel* (1994), his new translation of and commentary on the Gospel according to St John. His Aramaic, his Greek and his Hebrew all came into play here. It is an extraordinary testimony to an extraordinary man that he should have both begun and ended as a scholar, and have been the most popular politician of his time between.

Powell stopped writing poetry for publication shortly after his marriage. However, on the anniversary of his marriage each year he wrote a poem for Pamela. These poems are to be buried with him, for his widow will not publish them. That is a fitting thing to record about a man who was such an improbable combination of purist, pedant, romantic and patriot. He was, also, one of the greatest of our patriots. He

would deny the adjective in that last sentence. But he would, I hope, be pleased by the noun.

— Patrick Cosgrave

Most British politicians achieve fame because of achievements as Prime Minister or as a high-ranking Cabinet minister, writes Professor Denis Kavanagh. Enoch Powell's ministerial career is insignificant – a year at the Treasury and three years as minister of health, only one of which was in the Cabinet – but he is one of the towering figures in post-war British politics and that is because of his speeches. He has already been the subject of over a dozen biographies, more than any other post-war politician except for Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher.

What fascinates about Powell's career is its combination of the prophet and the pariah. He was ahead of his time in breaking with the post-war consensus, making a case for the free market, and warning of the consequences of membership of the European Community. But colleagues shunned him after 1968, as they shunned nobody else.

Enoch Powell's career abounds in paradoxes. He loved institutions, particularly the House of Commons, the Conservative party, his university and his country. But he was also a maverick, though a gifted one, like Joseph Chamberlain and Oswald Mosley. Like them, his passionate commitment to causes led to complaints that he lacked "judgement" and was "not a team player", to breaches with colleagues and ultimately to a split with his party.

At times his attachment to a particular principle was hardly self-advancing. He refused office in 1952, resigned as part of Peter Thorneycroft's Treasury team in 1957, refused office again in 1959 and, finally, Alec Home's invitation to join his Cabinet in 1963. Powell was not so noble enough to be a successful conspirator, although the pro-Bulter faction of the Cabinet, which sought to block the succession of Lord Home in 1963, met at his house in South Eaton Place. When Home formed a government Bulter and most of the other objectors joined, while Powell remained on the sidelines. After Powell's 1968 speech on race Ted Heath dismissed him as the party's defence spokesman.

Powell, like Thatcher, gave rise to an "ism". There are books on his political ideas and various editions of his essays and speeches, something which could be said of no other post-war British politician. Powell's speeches dealt with the big issues – relations between the individual and the state, the tensions between state sovereignty, national identity and the European Community, the nature of patriotism and the very purpose of politics. He memorably dismissed the 1970 Heath/Wilson general election as a choice between a man with a pipe and a man with a boat. He wrote out his entire speeches in advance, dispensing with the now familiar team of speechwriters to supply phrases and themes. Each speech dealt with a single issue.

In the early years Powellism was associated with free-market economics, reductions in public spending, cuts in income tax and a monetarist analysis of inflation. He was preaching economic Thatcherism a decade before Mrs Thatcher. Then, after a single 3,000-word speech on race and immigration on 20 April 1968, Powellism was forever to be associated with race. Later it came to encompass the rejection of British membership of the European Community and then preserving Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.

On each of these issues Powell stood outside the frontbench liberal consensus. His stand on race made him the most reviled member of the House of Commons and a hate figure on university campuses. Yet polls showed that he was one of the most popular figures in the land and for a time he was favoured to succeed Heath as Conservative leader. Within a fortnight of the 1968 speech he had received over 120,000 letters of support. He had struck a chord with the British people, tapping disillusion with politicians and voicing a popular concern that his parliamentary colleagues ignored. He was saying the unsayable.

Yet the speech that made him also destroyed him. Race was the only subject that brought him majority public support; but the more popular he became the more unacceptable he was to the political elite. He had gone beyond the political pale and many of his long-standing friendships were ruptured.

Free marketeers at the Institute of Economic Affairs, for example, who had long looked to him for leadership, turned away in despair because of his speeches on race. But he never expressed regret about his course of action. Heath and those around him regarded Powell's speeches as a bid for the leadership. He disagreed: "You don't calculate. Politicians are like seeds and can't control where the wind will take them." Powell and race became synonymous and he attracted some squalid followers.

Powell defies categorisation as a right-winger. Unlike Thatcher, he opposed capital punishment, was suspicious of the United States, rejected Britain's claim to a world role, believed in society, or a group of people which "looks inward" as a community to its members" and dismissed the Thatcher government's utilitarian approach to higher education as "barbarism". (He was not a Classics scholar for nothing.)

Essentially, Powell was a British nationalist – his grandfather had emigrated from Wales to the Black Country. Because he believed that self-consciousness was the essence of nationhood he rejected black immigration. Britain's membership of the European Community, or a role for the Dublin government in Ulster politics. These were issues above party politics.

His refusal to support Britain's membership of the European Community led him in the February 1974 general election to the ultimate political betrayal when he told his supporters to vote Labour. When, to his great surprise, he awoke to learn that Heath had lost the election he returned to his morning bath singing the Te Deum. Twelve months later, after Heath had lost another election and was being challenged for the party leadership by Thatcher, Powell was no longer able to profit, he was now an Ulster Unionist for Down South.

Powell's major speeches still read well. But they gained force in delivery by his flat Black Country accent that at times rose to a whine, his clipped dark moustache, hypnotic eyes and three-piece suits. In conversation he once recalled, "With words I dislodged stones", and likened the impact of his 1968 speech to "an earthquake". For a time he appealed to an audience beyond politics and across parties.

When he lost his Commons seat in 1987 Powell rejected the after-life of the retired politician. He dismissed suggestions of writing an autobiography, which he said, in 1989, would be "like a dog returning to its vomit, to its shit", and refused to provide a running commentary on the Government's performance of the day. He was not impressed by the efforts of other retired politicians to write tell-tale diaries and memoirs, to attract money and celebrity status.

Powell was a throwback to the 19th century in demonstrating the power of an independent MP. He dispensed with research teams and select committees and spurned directorships. He was the only MP who refused to comply with the register of MPs' interests. With pointed questions and speeches in Parliament – and outside – he showed what a single MP could do. He regarded the role of the MP as simply to force ministers to explain themselves on the floor of the House of Commons. The Government's task was to win the consent of the House – and, through that, of the British people.

Powell was professional, to a fault in the sense of his thorough application to problems. But he deplored the rise of professional politicians, particularly what he dismissed as the Heathmen in the 1970s, people for whom politics was a career and whose career was politics. His wide range of interests was reflected in his ability to speak and write authoritatively on such a wide range of non-political subjects.

In his life of Joseph Chamberlain (Joseph Chamberlain, 1977) Powell noted that all political lives, unless terminated prematurely, end in failure. In fact Powell self-destructed on the British party system and political culture. The more he appealed beyond the Conservative Party and the country at large so the less acceptable he was to colleagues. The cabinet system places a premium on collective decision-making and a willingness to compromise. Even Winston Churchill by 1939 had to make his peace with colleagues he had attacked and between 1986 and 1990 Michael Heseltine was always careful to protect his base in the Conservative Party. Many of Powell's single-issue campaigns failed. But, as he told a television interviewer in 1989, "I may have failed. That does not mean I was wrong."

BIRTHS

ELL: To Noeline (nee Burns) and Andrew, a daughter, Anna Victoria, on Wednesday 4 February 1998, a sister for Elizabeth, Joseph and Theresa.

or BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS, telephone 071-253 281 or fax 071-253 280.

BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS

Birthdays

Mr Norman Adams, painter and ceramic sculptor, 71; Air Commandant Barbara Doucet-Amos, former Metron-in-Chief, RAF Nursing Service, 77; Miss Mia Farrow, actress, 53; Dr Garrett Fitzgerald, former Prime

Minister, Irish Republic, 72; Mr Paul Flynn MP, 63; Miss Kathryn Grayson, actress and singer, 76; Dr George Guest, organist, 74; Sir Robert Johnson, High Court judge, 65; Miss Carole King, singer and songwriter, 56; Mr Sandy Lytle, golfer,

40; Sir Donald Miller, former chairman, Scottish Power, 71; Professor Michael Sterling, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Brunel University, 52; Miss Janet Szeman, actress, 59; Mr Clive Swift, actor, 62; Lord Williams of Elvel, 65.

Anniversaries

Births: Anthony Hope (Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins), novelist, 1863; Mrs Patrick Campbell (nee Beatrice Stella Turner), actress, 1865; Alban Maria Johannes Berg, composer, 1885; Brendan Behan, playwright,

1923. Deaths: George Norman Douglas, novelist and essayist, 1952; Bill Haley (William John Clifton Haley), rock musician, 1981. Today is the Feast Day of St. Alto, St. Ambert, St. Apollonia, St. Nicophorus of Antioch, St. Sabinius of Canosa and St. Teilo.

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS

The Prince of Wales undertakes an official visit to Changing of the Guard. The Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, 11am. For reasons of space, today's CASE SUMMARIES have been held over.

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Ministers fear Glaxo merger could damage drug industry

Senior ministers are concerned that the proposed merger between Glaxo Wellcome and SmithKline Beecham could damage the long-term future of the drug industry and the British economy. Andrew Yates reports that the Government is likely to back union demands for the protection of thousands of research and development jobs.

Margaret Beckett, President of the Board of Trade, and Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer, are both understood to be alarmed that the proposed creation of the biggest drugs company in the world could lead to substantial job losses among skilled scientists. They consider such a loss of important technical staff would be bad for future scientific research and for the British economy.

MSF, the white-collar science union, is currently seeking undertakings from Glaxo and SmithKline that they will not close any R&D facilities as a result of the merger, amid growing concerns about substantial redundancies. The Labour Government is now expected to require such undertakings before allowing the merger to take place.

The authorities are also thought to be looking at forcing the merged company to dispose of one or more top-selling drugs to prevent it from dominating some specialised markets, even though its share of the world pharmaceuticals market as a whole will be less than 10 per cent. For example, Glaxo sells Zovirax, the main anti-herpes treatment, while SmithKline has Famvir, its main competitor.

The MSF will this week step up its campaign by calling a meeting of its Parliamentary Committee. More than 80 MPs are members of the MSF, including Chris Smith, the Culture Minister.

The union will also attempt to increase the pressure on the drugs companies to dis-

cuss their cost-cutting plans. The MSF has lobbied furiously for more information about job losses ever since Glaxo and SmithKline announced merger talks 10 days ago. However, the companies have refused to comment on possible redundancies.

Paul Talbot, national secretary for the pharmaceutical industry at MSF, said: "The fact that Glaxo and SmithKline have not talked to us is really not acceptable. A convincing case for this merger has yet to be established."

The union is now pursuing a meeting with Margaret Beckett and Karyl van Miert, the European Competition Minister, as soon as possible to push forward its concerns.

The MSF is confident that Margaret Beckett will move to protect research and development expenditure and jobs. Mr Talbot said: "We don't want Margaret Beckett to just nod through this deal and leave it up to the EU competition authorities."

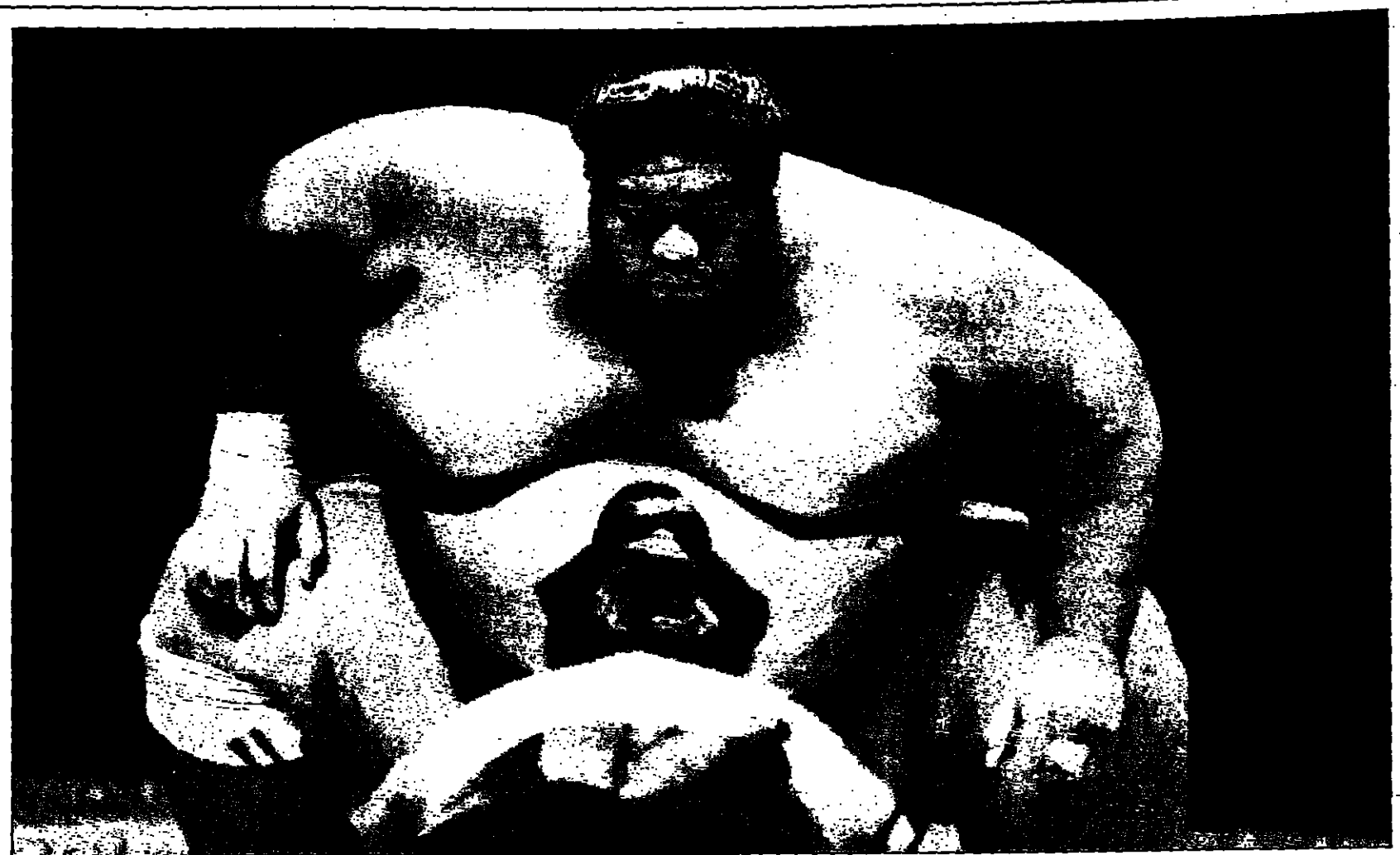
"Mrs. Beckett has indicated in the past that R&D is a concern, and the Treasury has also been a generous supporter of research and development in this country."

The MSF is threatening legal action if the companies continue to ignore a European law that requires them to speak to employees in the event of forced redundancies.

Together, Glaxo and SmithKline will become a huge force in the drugs industry, with an R&D budget of £2bn a year, representing a fifth of all R&D spending in the UK. If that budget was cut as the companies slashed costs, it would be a severe blow for Britain's scientific community.

Glaxo and SmithKline altogether currently employ more than 4,000 research and development staff. Glaxo's main research facility is at Stevenage in Hertfordshire, which was opened at a cost of £700m in 1995 and houses 1,700 workers. SmithKline employs 2,000 people at its new £250m research site in Harlow, Essex.

Overall, the two companies employ 21,000 people in the UK and 107,000 worldwide. Unions fear up to 10,000 job losses globally, 2,000 of which could occur in the UK.



Alisport, the agency responsible for some of the best-known sports images like this picture of Konishi 'The Durntruck', is being acquired by Getty Communications, the Nasdaq-listed company controlled by the Getty family. The deal is worth \$30m (£19m). Getty Communications has

already collected picture archive Hulton Getty, news agency Gamma Liaison, Tony Stone Images and the Energy Film Library. On Friday Getty Communications announced a 20 per cent rise in profits to £15.4m in the final quarter of 1997 compared to the same period in 1996.

Government slips on spending and borrowing targets

The Government is in danger of missing its own targets for spending and borrowing, and Britain will come embarrassingly close to not even qualifying for membership of the single European currency, because the public finances were not in as healthy a state as first estimated last year.

The disappointing figures, which were probably the result of unexpected higher spending by local authorities, will redouble Gordon Brown's determination to stick to his tough line on expenditure in next month's Budget.

The news will come as a shock to analysts, who have focused on the impressive control of expenditure by central government departments. It could increase pres-

sure on Mr Brown from the City to raise taxes even more than currently planned, as some experts think the Chancellor is already leaving too much of the task of slowing the economy to the Bank of England, which sets interest rates.

The shortfall between revenues and expenditure could now exceed the Chancellor's forecast of a £9.5bn borrowing requirement in the current financial year. It is likely to have been very close to the 3 per cent of GDP ceiling set in the Maastricht Treaty for the calendar year 1997, rather than the 2.3 per cent originally estimated.

Detailed official figures for total current government expenditure in the second and third quarters of 1997 show spending to

have been £500,000 higher than first estimates for April-June, and £1bn greater in July-September. Only the revenues from the windfall tax on the privatised utilities in the final quarter of 1997 are likely to have kept the critical deficit to GDP ratio below the 3 per cent limit.

David Owen, an economist at Dresdner Kleinwort Benson, the investment bank, said the overspending was likely to continue into 1998. "With slower growth hitting the government's finances as well this year, we could easily see the targets for the public sector borrowing requirement being over-shot," he said.

He predicted the PSBR would amount to £12.3bn in 1998/99, likely to be slightly

above this year's out-turn and much higher than the Treasury's forecast of £4.5bn for next financial year. The Red Book analysis of the public sector finances published with the Budget will have to acknowledge the disappointing result for 1997/98 so far.

Although the full details are still unavailable, the slippage on expenditure seems to have come about because of the freeing of proceeds from local authority asset sales for capital spending.

This has allowed authorities to use money that would have been earmarked for investment projects to increase their current spending on items like education budgets and pay.

- Diane Coyle

Branson in talks to save Tunnel rail link

Richard Branson's Virgin group is in talks with Railtrack and the US construction company Bechtel to form a new consortium to salvage the Channel Tunnel rail link. Michael Harrison examines the proposal.

Under the revised scheme, construction of the 68-mile link from the Kent coast into central London would be left to Railtrack and Bechtel while Virgin would run the Eurostar train service.

Virgin and Bechtel are

members of the discredited London & Continental Railways consortium which collapsed two weeks ago after the Government refused to provide an additional £1.2bn on top of the £1.8bn subsidy already granted to build the link. However, Virgin had already withdrawn in all but name.

Bechtel is credited with getting construction of the Channel Tunnel itself back on track after it was brought in by Euro-tunnel to manage the project and liaise with the contractors Transmanche Link. Railtrack and Virgin executives are to hold further talks this week about a joint approach to the Government.

The Railtrack board meets on Thursday to review progress and examine options for financing and building the link.

Potential rival Eurostar, a consortium of construction companies and banks which lost out to LCR in the bidding for the link in 1996, is due to set out its new proposals for taking over the scheme tomorrow or Wednesday.

One possibility Railtrack is considering is building the link in phases. It has been designed to end at a new terminus at St Pancras but this would involve 12 miles of expensive tunnelling under central London.

An alternative is to end the high-speed line at Ebbsfleet in

north Kent and then continue on existing track to the terminus at Waterloo International.

A spokesman said: "This would be a lot cheaper than doing the fully-fledged link in one year. As income starts to flow in from customers using the first stage we could build the revenue to continue developing the line further."

A group of MPs representing constituencies in East London and Kent will today table a Commons motion urging the Government to press ahead with the rail link, arguing that thousands of jobs and commuter services will be at risk if the project is scrapped.

Advisers would net £30m from PacifiCorp's bid for Energy Group

Financial advisers in London and New York would net almost £30m from the takeover bid for Energy Group by PacifiCorp of the US, according to the offer document posted to shareholders over the weekend.

It shows that if the deal goes through Goldman Sachs, the US investment bank which is advising PacifiCorp, will receive \$13.5m (£8.3m) for the work, plus "reasonable out of pocket expenses".

PacifiCorp also confirmed that it had so far spent a combined total of \$60m on bank fees, legal expenses and other costs in its attempts to acquire the UK power group, which owns Eastern Electricity, the UK's largest regional power supplier.

The offer document also reveals that PacifiCorp lost \$65m (£41m) on the foreign exchange markets after its original offer for Energy Group lapsed last summer.

The US group had entered into foreign exchange contracts worth £1.45bn to hedge against changes in the dollar exchange rate.

Energy Group's financial adviser, Lazard's has already received £2.5m and will gain a fur-

ther £5.8m if the PacifiCorp bid is successful, according to the document. In addition Energy Group said it had so far paid its other advisers, Morgan Stanley, some £3.4m for work on the previous bid and would pay the bankers another £7.6m for the new deal.

PacifiCorp last week launched a raised £4.06bn offer for Energy Group, but could face two other rival bidders in the shape of Texas Utilities, the Dallas power supplier and Nomura, the Japanese investment bank. Both potential predators are still in discussions with Energy Group management but have yet to pounce formally.

PacifiCorp last year offered £3.6bn for the UK business, but the bid lapsed when the deal was referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The US utility was cleared to come back with a new bid last December.

The PacifiCorp offer document shows that Derek Bonham, Energy Group's executive chairman, will emerge with £1.38m from shares in Energy Group if the bid goes through, based on Friday's closing share price of 779p.

- Chris Godsmark

China admits Asian crisis will damage its exports

Prospects for China's exports and foreign investment "have probably never been dimmer" because of Asia's financial crisis, a state-controlled newspaper admitted yesterday. The warning was in sharp contrast to previous official reassurances that the Chinese economy was not seriously vulnerable to the turmoil in neighbouring countries. The report in the English-language *China Business Daily* stated that: "Weaker purchasing power in South-east Asia, Japan and South Korea is set to reduce or postpone their imports from China."

Some products manufactured in South-east Asian countries are now far more competitive against Chinese goods because of sliding currencies, but Peking has pledged repeatedly not to devalue the yuan. This year China expects a much lower trade surplus than last year's record US\$40bn.

- Teresa Poole, Peking

Small firms back euro

Support for the euro has leapt among small and medium-sized business, with nearly half in favour of a single currency, according to a survey by 3i, the investment group. The finding, which showed support for monetary union running at 48 per cent, reverses a marked hostility to the euro in the same survey a year ago. The 1997 survey showed 30 per cent in favour and 40 per cent opposed. In contrast, businesses oppose the Social Chapter in increasing numbers. The survey showed 60 per cent saying they tended to disagree or strongly disagreed with it.

Court to hear EMU attack

One of four academics making a legal bid to stop Germany from joining the European single currency said the country's constitutional court was about to admit the case, in a move he claimed could delay the euro's launch. Professor Karl Albrecht Schachtschneider said the court had decided to ask the German government, parliament, federal states and several other bodies to make statements on the issues raised. But a German government spokesman said he was not aware of any request from the constitutional court.

Hoare Govett name ditched

Hoare Govett will disappear as a City name this week as its Dutch owner rebrands its investment banks. From today, ABN Amro Hoare Govett will be known only as ABN Amro. The investment giant's American arm, ABN Amro Chicago Corporation, will also have its name shortened to the first two words.

STOCK MARKETS

FTSE 100									
Index	Close	1st day	1st day %	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield (%)			
FTSE 100	5829.70	171.20	3.14	5675.1	4189.1	3.18			
FTSE 250	4970.40	108.80	2.24	4965.5	3384.2	3.138			
FTSE 350	2880.30	77.40	2.77	2866.2	2075.7	3.148			
FTSE All Share	2698.93	72.25	2.88	2683.88	2066.07	3.134			
FTSE 100 Div	2410.60	37.90	1.60	2407.4	2189.1	2.921			
FTSE 100 Div Yield	1707.70	15.00	1.16	1748.5	1225.2	3.282			
FTSE AIM	988.10	14.50	1.49	1138	965.9	1.04			
Dow Jones	8189.49	289.99	3.58	8289.03	6356.78	1.867			
Nikkei	17040.06	411.59	2.48	20910.73	14488.21	0.959			
Hong Kong	10485.86	1233.50	13.33	16820.31	7909.13	3.744			
Dax	4496.33	85.85	1.26	4576.55	3046.53	1.72			

www.bloomberg.com/uk

source: Bloomberg

INTEREST RATES

UK Interest rates									
Index	3 months	1 yr	2 yr	5 yr	10 yr	1 yr	2 yr	5 yr	10 yr
UK	7.56	1.28	7.49	0.71	6.10	-1.17	6.08	-1.39	-1.39
US	5.63	0.08	5.08	-0.19	5.82	-0.78	5.92	-0.84	-0.84
Japan	0.84	0.34	0.93	0.26	2.02	-0.83	2.84	-0.81	-0.81
Germany	3.52	0.37	3.80	0.57	5.10	-0.58	5.69	-0.84	-0.84

Bond Yields									
Index	3 months	1 yr	2 yr	5 yr	10 yr	Long	1 yr	2 yr	5 yr
UK	7.56	1.28	7.49	0.71	6.10	-1.17	6.08	-1.39	-1.39
US	5.63	0.08	5.08	-0.19	5.82	-0.78	5.92	-0.84	-0.84
Japan	0.84	0.34	0.93	0.26	2.02	-0.83	2.84	-0.81	-0.81
Germany	3.52	0.37	3.80	0.57	5.10	-0.58	5.69	-0.84	-0.84

MAIN PRICE CHANGES									
Rises	Price	1st day	1st day %	Falls	Price	1st day	1st day %		
Amos	628.00	207.00	49.17	Bull Bloch	99.00	-38.00	-27.74		
Hardy Oil	287.50	44.50	18.31	Bloomsbury	345.00	-85.00	-19.77		
Dalmeida	835.00	51.00	17.96	Powerscreen	218.00	-42.00	-15.28		
Persimmon	227.00	34.50	17.82	Diageo	665.00	-72.42	-11.40		

CURRENCIES

Pound									
Index	1st day	1st day %	1st day	1st day %	1st day	1st day %	1st day	1st day %	1st day
Dollar	1.6455	+1.12%	1.6383	0.8077	-0.41%	0.8112	0.8077	-0.41%	0.8112
D-Mark	2.9689	-2.30%	2.7027	1.8079	-2.18%	1.6518	1.8079	-2.18%	1.6518
Yen	203.66	+3.98	202.66	124.21	+2.58	123.76	124.21	+2.58	123.76
£ Index	104.40	-0.80	96.80	\$ Index	107.30	-2.30	102.70		

Dollar									
Index	1st day	1st day %	1st day	1st day %	1st day	1st day %	1st day	1st day %	1st day
Dollar	1.6455	+1.12%	1.6383	0.8077	-0.41%	0.8112	0.8077	-0.41%	0.8112
D-Mark	2.9689	-2.30%	2.7027	1.8079	-2.18%	1.6518	1.8079	-2.18%	1.6518
Yen	203.66	+3.98	202.66	124.21	+2.58	123.76	124.21	+2.58	123.76
£ Index	104.40	-0.80	96.80	\$ Index	107.30	-2.30	102.70		

OTHER INDICATORS									
Index	1st day	1st day %	1st day	1st day %	1st day	1st day %	1st day	1st day %	1st day
Brent Oil (\$)	14.66	-0.71	22.04	113.50	3.10	110.46	113.50	3.10	110.46
Gold (\$)	296.65	-2.80	342.65	186.00	3.80	184.44	186.00	3.80	184.44
Silver (\$)	7.81	1.78	4.80	Base Rates	7.25	6.00			

TOURIST RATES

Australia (dollars)		7.35	Italy (lira)		2,804
Austria (schillings)	20.06	201.08	Japan (yen)		
Belgium (francs)	59.00	201.08	Malta (lira)		
Canada (\$)	2.28	0.62	Netherlands (guilders)	3.21	
Cyprus (pounds)	0.84	11.97	Norway (kroner)		
Denmark (kroner)	10.95	290.82	Portugal (escudos)	240.83	
Finland (markka)	8.75	12.85	Spain (pesetas)		
France (francs)	9.55	7.74	South Africa (rand)		
Germany (marks)	2.86	12.85	Sweden (kroner)		
Greece (drachmes)	453.29	1.60	Switzerland (francs)		
Hong Kong (\$)	12.30	348.465	Turkey (lira)		
Ireland (pounds)	1.14	1.60	USA (\$)		

Source: Thomson Data
Rates for information purposes only



GAVIN DAVIES ON THE WAY THE PARTY CAUGHT UP WITH THE ELECTORATE

How Labour gained from its shift to the centre

When the Blair/Brown ticket took control of the Labour Party in 1994, they immediately threw overboard the cautious "one more heave" strategy of John Smith. They were convinced that the Labour Party had been "one election behind the electorate" in its progressive shift to the centre following the 1983 debacle, and they had no intention of repeating the same mistake again.

They believed that it was crucial to shake the electorate's perception of where Labour stood on the main issues, even if this involved leaping right across the centre, and adopting centre-right positions on some key economic issues. The resulting party and policy revolution of 1994-96 was implemented with ruthless efficiency.

Four years, and one election landslide, later, two key questions need to be asked about this strategy. First, did it actually work in attracting new votes for the Labour Party from previously virgin territory? Second, to what extent did it cost votes among disaffected core Labour supporters?

A superficial look at the results of the last election would certainly suggest that the Labour revolution succeeded in attracting many new votes in previously hostile territory. A non-superficial look—based on post-election studies written by John Curtice, Michael Stead, Anthony Heath, Peter Kellner and Pippa Norris among others—suggests exactly the same thing. In fact, only rarely can an electoral strategy have hit its intended target so precisely.

First, there is no question that voters noticed extremely clearly that the nature of the Labour Party had changed. Data from the British Election Panel Study enable us to compare Labour's position

on several key issues—such as tax and spend, and nationalisation—with that of the electorate as a whole. When we do this, we find that the electorate perceived Labour to be much nearer the centre, or even the right, in 1997 than they had in 1992. In particular, 57 per cent of the population believed they were to the right of Labour on tax and spend in 1992, whereas only 38 per cent believed they were to Labour's right in 1997.

Furthermore, the swing to Labour from 1992-97 was much greater among centre-right voters than among the left. Among those who considered themselves to Labour's left in 1992, the swing to Labour in 1997 was only 4 per cent. Among those who believed themselves in 1992 to be to Labour's right, the swing was around 10 per cent.

In addition, there is plenty of evidence that Labour's pledge to freeze income tax rates had a big electoral pay-off. In 1992, Labour trailed the Tories by 22 per cent as the party most trusted to take the right decisions on income tax, whereas by 1997 Labour actually led the Conservatives by 8 points.

Income tax seems to have been especially important among those people who decided to desert the Conservatives. In this group of voters, Labour led the Tories by 18 points on the tax issue, more than twice its lead among the rest of the electorate.

For whatever reason, Labour did not only attract centre-right votes in unprecedented numbers in 1997, but it did so in precisely the right geographical spots to win seats.

The swing to Labour was 12-13 per cent in London and the South-east, but only 7 per cent in Wales and Scotland, and around 9-11 per cent in the Midlands and North.

Not only that, but Labour was now perceived to be sufficiently close to the Liberal Democrats to enable widespread tactical voting to take place. In Conservative seats where Labour was second in 1992, Labour's share of the vote went up by 13 per cent, while the Liberal Democrats' share declined by 3 per cent. The opposite pattern applied in seats where the Liberal Democrats were second.

These variations in swing for tactical reasons greatly increased the size of Labour's majority. According to Pippa Norris, a uniform national swing would have produced 46 more Conservative seats, 28 of which would have been subtracted from Labour and 18 from the Liberal Democrats. Of these extra seats, roughly half may have fallen directly to the phenomenon of tactical voting, while

the rest may have been influenced by variations in regional swing.

Wherever we look, it is the same story of Labour making massive gains in previously untouched areas. The swing to Labour among mortgage-payers was 18 per cent, while that among council tenants was 2 per cent. The swing among graduates was a massive 19 per cent, and among share owners an even more remarkable 28 per cent. The swing among skilled non-manual workers was 25 per cent, while that among unskilled manual workers was only 2 per cent. To some extent, these phenomenal differences are no doubt explained by the fact that Labour was already dominant among its core supporters in 1992, but surely something much more significant was afoot.

The second question is whether core supporters were significantly turned off by Labour's shift to the centre. Here the verdict must be mixed. Although the swings to Labour were much smaller among its core supporters than in the rest of the population, Labour continued to enjoy huge absolute leads over the Conservatives in these core groups. So there was no major sign of erosion in the shares of votes actually cast.

However, there we clearly some signs of left-wing disaffection in the figures for turnout. On average, turnout in Labour seats was only 68 per cent, compared to 74 per cent in Conservative seats, the widest gap ever. It is possible that this can be partly explained by the fact that Labour's large opinion poll leads led to apathy in its safe seats, but we do not find that

the drop in turnout was related at all to the closeness of the local race.

By contrast, it is clear that turnout fell most in seats with a high concentration of working class votes. In addition, the "loyalty factor" among working class voters—ie the propensity of working people to prefer Labour, over and above that which is explained by its ideological stance on the major issues—was significantly eroded in 1997. The working class continued to vote Labour in dominant numbers, but not to any greater extent than would have been expected from their views on the major issues. This is one indication that the special ties between Labour and its core supporters may have partially broken down.

However, there is no question that Labour made massive electoral gains from this trade-off between core and non-core support. The shift to the centre led to disproportionate gains in Labour votes in the most effective geographical areas, and permitted a much greater degree of co-operative or tactical voting with the Liberal Democrats than ever before. By contrast, any decline that there may have been in turnout among core Labour supporters probably cost very few seats.

So New Labour's electoral strategy definitely worked. But to what extent is the Labour Party in government now hoist with its own petard? Is it prevented from introducing a radical programme of policy reform, presumably involving a significant degree of income redistribution, by the fear of alienating the new supporters on which its electoral landslide was based?

This is a complicated question, since there is plenty of evidence that some forms of tax and spend—"competent tax and competent spend"—are still very attractive to the electorate. I will return to this topic next week.

Party ratings on the main issues (%)

	CONSERVATIVE		LABOUR		LIB DEM	
	1997	Change since 1992	1997	Change since 1992	1997	Change since 1992
The economy	42	-11	44	+11	13	0
Income tax	38	-19	44	+13	20	+6
(a) Economy						
Conservative	42	97	11	22	39	18
Labour	44	3	87	14	38	79
Liberal Democrat	13	0	3	64	23	4
(b) Income tax						
Conservative	36	92	7	11	26	12
Labour	44	5	85	11	44	80
Liberal Democrat	20	4	8	78	30	9

The table represents responses to the question, "which party do you trust to take the right decisions about..." Source: BSC/NOP and poll, Peter Kellner

First Leisure may set up its own restaurant chain

First Leisure, the bars-to-bowling group chaired by ex-Channel 4 boss Michael Grade, is considering setting up its own restaurant chain. Mr Grade is understood to have looked at a number of sites around London, including several in Covent Garden, according to industry sources.

If First Leisure can find the right sites it is likely to create a string of branded restaurants. It could also consider buying an existing chain.

Expanding into restaurants would be Mr Grade's first new

venture since he joined First Leisure last June. He has already undertaken a fundamental review of the company, putting the troubled bingo division on the market and identifying a number of other under-performing businesses to be sold.

Mr Grade is now exploring a number of other possibilities in the leisure industry, in an effort to restore the City's faith in the troubled group. First Leisure's shares have fallen from a peak of 399p in 1996 to 297.5p and have under-performed the market by 40 per



Michael Grade: Seeking to restore the City's faith

cent over the last year. He is keen to create another division at First Leisure to complement the nightclubs, bowling, and health and fitness businesses that he has pledged to expand.

— Andrew Yates

Revenue could allow earlier company pensions

More than 10 million people could for the first time be able to draw benefits from company pension schemes without leaving their jobs, under ground-breaking new proposals. Andrew Verity reports.

The Inland Revenue has issued a radical proposal that any member of a pension scheme should be able to draw pension benefits without ceasing to work for the organisation which

runs the scheme, from the age of 50.

The proposals are contained in a little-noticed recent discussion paper. If adopted, they will cut the traditional link between stopping work and retiring—a link the Revenue has insisted on until now.

The Revenue states that it hopes to bring in the measures by the end of this year.

Pension experts yesterday welcomed them. Tom Ross, former chairman of the National Association of Pension Funds, yesterday said: "This is a significant change and, I think, a good one. This is get-

ting rid of one of the barriers in the system."

Alan Fishman, chief actuary at Sedgwick Noble Lowndes, said: "This is an important change which recognises the fact that there has been a serious problem amongst over-50s who are not employed. It gives a welcome degree of flexibility."

John Hinton, a senior official in charge of savings policy at the Revenue, says in the paper: "The reasons for these proposed changes would be to recognise that, as working patterns are changing, retirement is becoming less clear cut... The changes should particularly help

those who wish to phase in their retirement by moving from full-time to part-time work."

The plan would iron out a widely-recognised inequality in the pensions system. Holders of personal pensions are already allowed to draw benefits after the age of 50, whether or not they are working. But the option is denied to members of company schemes.

Mr Ross said: "This is adding to flexibility in the labour market. There are companies which are trying to keep people, perhaps in a part-time job, for their experience, and this will help them."

Members of company pension schemes can currently only access their pension benefits by joining another employer. The Revenue has also angered directors of small companies by insisting they cannot remain on the board—even in an unpaid role—if they have started to draw pension benefits.

However, pension experts are warning that employees should not rush to take up the option without working out the implications. Because pensions taken early are stretched over a greater number of years, this means benefits will be lower.

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Highland battle over rights to Nessie's heritage

Not since the Jacobites laid siege to the place in 1689 has Castle Urquhart, on the shore of Loch Ness, been surrounded by such bitter dispute. A £2.7m plan for a visitor centre has divided the nearby village of Drumnadrochit. The Loch Ness Monster industry has taken the hump and Historic Scotland, custodian of the castle, has been branded a heritage vandal. Our Heritage Correspondent, Stephen Goodwin, explains.

Donald Dewar will need all his lawyer's sagacity in sorting out self-interest from public interest. The Secretary of State for Scotland has called in Historic Scotland's plan for a visitor centre and car park for a public inquiry. Castle Urquhart stands like a broken tooth on a rocky promontory jutting out into Loch Ness. Commanding a panorama of the Great Glen, it has probably been the site of fortresses since the Dark Ages. It was one of the last castles to keep alive Robert the Bruce's independence struggle in the 14th century and later was repeatedly sacked by the fearsome MacDonnells, Lords of the Isles.

The tower-house which dominates the ruins today dates from the 16th century. More might have survived had Highlanders, who successfully defended the castle against a much larger Jacobite force in 1689, not blown up many buildings when they left the garrison three years later.

Opponents of the visitor centre plan portray Historic Scotland as bent on similar desecration. "They are supposed to be the custodians of Scotland's heritage. But what they are proposing is its destruction," said Gordon Menzies, chairman of Drumnadrochit Community Council, emphasising this was his personal view.



No room for a view: To cope with the hordes, Historic Scotland says a visitor centre should be built here at Urquhart Castle, an excellent spot for Nessie-watching

The only point of agreement between the two camps is that something has to be done about traffic management at the castle which is below a bend on the busy A82 trunk road snaking alongside the loch. Since 1985, annual visitor numbers have risen from 70,000 to almost 250,000, making it Scotland's third most popular monument. With only space for 39 cars, thousands of visitors are turned away. Police have threatened to shut the castle if the traffic situation does not improve.

The plan - scaled down after protests - is for a visitor centre sunk into a grass slope running down from the road towards the castle. There would be parking for 120 cars and 12 coaches and a tearoom, rather

than a restaurant as originally planned.

To further placate the traders of Drumnadrochit, the quango proposed a pay-on-entry system to ensure only those visiting the castle could use the tea room and toilets and promised not to sell Nessie souvenirs in the shop.

Dominating the village, two miles from the castle, are two Monster exhibitions, one calling itself "Official" and the other "Original" - but that is another story. Unfortunately the loch is not visible from either centre whereas the view from the castle is ideal for monster watching.

Traders claim they are not opposed to having a visitor centre - they just don't like the idea of this one. Ronnie Bremner, owner

of the Official Loch Ness Monster Exhibition, offered Historic Scotland a plan for a centre on land he owns on the opposite side of the A82 from the castle. "That was three years ago. The plans were given in good faith but they never even had the decency to take them to Highland Council to consider," he said.

Mr Bremner's view that to develop in the field by the castle would be to "bastardise the jewel in the crown of Scottish tourism" is shared by Alastair MacPherson, chairman of the local chamber of commerce. He wants a park-and-ride scheme from a car park in the village centre, opposite his gallery - though that has nothing to do with his support for that proposal.

"I've painted Urquhart Castle more times than any other artist living or dead, so I do have a vested interest in it not being spoilt," Mr MacPherson said.

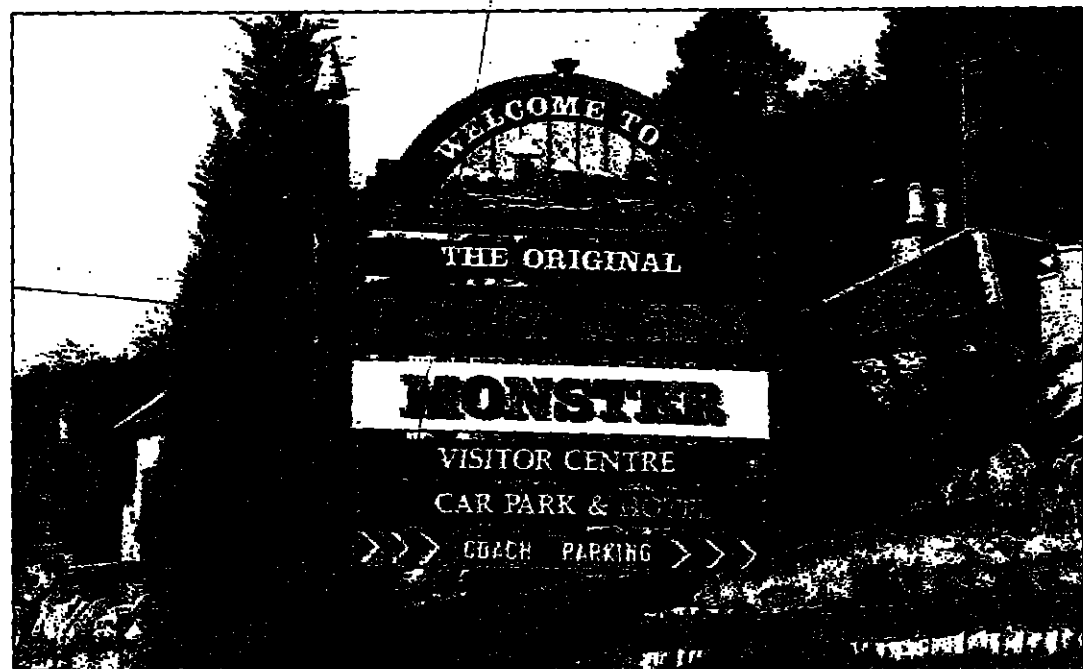
Highland Council officers recommended approval of the scaled-down scheme, but members rejected this advice, precipitating the public inquiry. The delay puts in jeopardy a conditional £900,000 grant from the European Union.

Councillor Pat Paterson, in whose ward the castle stands, is staunchly opposed while his Drumnadrochit neighbour, Margaret Davidson thinks the plan "the best in an imperfect world". "Historic Scotland does not desecrate monuments," Mrs Davidson said. She canvassed 200 people in the vil-

lage and found two thirds in favour, suggesting many kept quiet at public meetings.

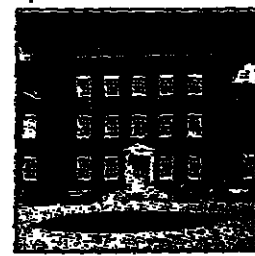
A visitor centre would enable the return to Castle Urquhart of almost 90 medieval artefacts, including decorated brooches, spurs and cross-bow bolts, unearthed early this century. But other fragments of bone, pottery and knife blades found recently during an archaeological survey for the quango are being claimed as a "technical knockout" by the anti. The archaeologist himself described the find as "not the most significant thing in the world". But as they know very well around Loch Ness, a great deal can be made from something which may not exist at all.

Photographs: John Voas



The real McCoy: Traders in the village of Drumnadrochit fear that the proposed visitor centre at Castle Urquhart will harm the lucrative Nessie industry. However, all agree that something has to be done about the congestion at the loch shore

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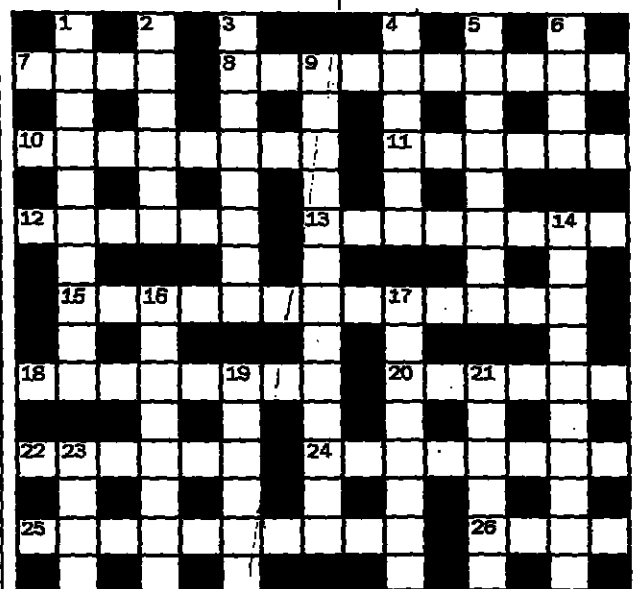
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No. 3529, Monday 9 February

By Porcia



ACROSS

- 7 Wild animal fur, say (4)
- 8 Kind of occupied with boss (5,5)
- 10 Unease about seedlings left out (8)
- 11 Isolated strike tax officer's drawn into (3,3)
- 12 Know about two names for vegetable (6)
- 13 A condition brought in just to make it easier (8)
- 15 Mad keen to rush off and find patrol (4,3,6)
- 18 Allow American out of hospital in Lincolnshire (8)
- 20 Secretary's way is to get us a drink (6)
- 22 Kingdom's crime-free area (6)

- 24 Girl's agitated cries accepted as instinctive (8)
- 25 Date of battle (10)
- 26 What's left in the bottle escapes (4)

DOWN

- 1 Light sleeper? (10)
- 2 See fit to conceal Pole's intention (6)
- 3 Spread secret involving French male (8)
- 4 Measure of liquid joker upset over headmaster (6)
- 5 Built a sort of operating plant (8)
- 6 Note of hesitation before fellow reveals official papers (4)
- 9 Total flop at the box office? (8)
- 14 A cafe society isn't stirring up intrigues (10)
- 16 Royal nipper? (8)
- 17 Converse with colleague on the spot (8)
- 19 Try getting out of Continental drive (6)
- 21 Soundly swipe respected British essayist (6)
- 23 Directions filled in by service flyer (4)